

# Paroles Gelées

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*UCLA French Studies*

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## Interview with Michel Delon

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Heather Howard

Professeur de littérature à Paris X-Nanterre, Michel Delon est un des spécialistes du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle les plus réputés de nos jours. A travers des livres et de nombreux articles, Professeur Delon a considérablement développé la recherche sur le roman libertin, en particulier sur le Marquis de Sade. On trouve parmi ses ouvrages: *De l'Encyclopédie aux Méditations, 1750-1820* (en collaboration avec R. Mauzi et S. Menant), *P.-A. Choderlos de Laclos, Les Liaisons dangereuses, L'Idée d'énergie au tournant des Lumières, 1770-1820*. Il a aussi édité plusieurs textes libertins du 18<sup>e</sup>. Actuellement, Professeur Delon dirige une édition critique de Sade chez Gallimard. Il est aussi l'auteur en collaboration avec Pierre Malandin, de *Littérature française du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*.<sup>1</sup>

En hiver 1996, Professeur Delon a donné un séminaire DEA/maîtrise à Nanterre intitulé "La Poétique du regard au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle." Delon y traite l'optique du regard dans la diversité de ses dispositifs dans les textes de théorie et de fiction de l'époque. Il démontre le déploiement du regard dans les œuvres de Diderot (le tableau esthétique), de Marivaux (le regard surpris ou la femme au miroir) et de Sade (le regard détourné), aussi bien que dans le roman libertin. A travers la dynamique du regard, le roman s'ouvre au lecteur qui participe activement dans la structuration de la narration. Le lecteur devient à la fois voyeur et acteur dans des scènes qui nécessitent toujours la présence d'un témoin. Sensibilité artistique et désir amoureux se traduisent également par des regards différents qui définissent des relations complexes entre objet du désir, sujet désirant et voyeur dérobé.

Michel Delon a eu la gentillesse de bien vouloir accorder une entrevue à *Paroles Gelées*. Nous avons choisi de parler de ses dernières recherches qui contribuent à établir une théorie du regard au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle.

*Paroles Gelées: Dans notre dernière conversation vous avez parlé de votre recherche sur le regard comme une ouverture de la discipline de la littérature française. Comment cette évolution va-t-elle s'effectuer?*

Delon: Je crois que la recherche en littérature française a moins évolué, sinon pris un peu de retard par rapport aux autres sciences

humaines, et de l'histoire en particulier, et je crois que nous allons évoluer en retrouvant ce que les historiens ont fait, à la fois dans l'histoire des institutions culturelles, mais surtout dans l'histoire de la lecture: comment on a lu aux différentes époques—c'est essentiel pour comprendre un texte, et nous allons y revenir toute à l'heure. Comment, selon les siècles... plutôt, quel a été à chaque siècle l'appareillage à la fois sensoriel, théorique et intellectuel des gens. Vous voyez?

*P.G.: Oui. Est-ce que cette ouverture "interdisciplinaire" comme on dit en anglais, pourrait mener à une histoire des idées ou même à une historicité de la sensorialité?*

D: Oui. L'histoire des idées, ce n'est pas l'histoire des systèmes, pas une histoire de la philosophie, c'est l'histoire d'éléments—ce qu'on appelle les idées—qui sont entre l'abstrait et le concret, entre les idées philosophiques proprement dites—c'est-à-dire les concepts, les notions, et des formes qui sont les textes littéraires, les œuvres artistiques, ou bien les rumeurs, ce qui traîne dans les têtes des gens à une époque. Donc, je crois que le littéraire, là, doit regrouper à la fois les textes qu'on appelait traditionnellement littéraires, mais aussi des essais, des traités scientifiques, ou des œuvres d'art.... Je crois qu'il faut dépasser la catégorie littéraire dans la mesure où l'on n'est pas capable de définir, de se mettre d'accord sur une définition de la littérarité.

*P.G.: Donc, par exemple, quand est-ce qu'un tableau pourrait être considéré comme objet d'étude?*

D: Eh bien, un tableau c'est à la fois l'œuvre de peinture et un certain nombre de scènes dans les textes littéraires, des scènes qui frappent et des scènes qui sont présentées par les écrivains comme devant avoir une certaine fonction par rapport au lecteur. C'est-à-dire que l'écrivain met en scène le tableau et sollicite le lecteur pour avoir une position par rapport à ce tableau.

*P.G.: Dans votre cours j'ai remarqué que vous avez beaucoup parlé du tableau comme à la fois attirant et détournant le regard du spectateur. Dans les Salons de Diderot, vous remarquez que ce qui intéresse est "l'exploration des limites de la représentation, la réflexion sur le jeu entre montrer et suggérer, présenter concrètement et laisser imaginer." Vous rapprochez cet état liminal de la représentation avec ce que vous appelez "le regard détourné." Pourriez-vous nous détailler ce rapport?*



D: Oui. Là nous venons de dire que nous ne savons pas comment définir la littérarité d'un texte. Je crois que Diderot se pose déjà le même problème et finalement le "texte littérature" c'est le texte qui a une dimension méta-textuelle, c'est-à-dire qui s'interroge sur ses propres limites: qu'est-ce que l'on peut montrer, à telle époque, dans tel genre donné? A la fois l'écrivain et son lecteur ont envie de montrer ou de voir ce qui est interdit. C'est l'interdit qui engage une dynamique de la lecture, métaphorisée par le regard, et qui fait que le texte avance. Donc, il y a à la fois besoin, surtout chez Diderot, d'un pôle de moralité, d'interdit et un pôle de désir qui fait qu'on va jouer avec l'interdit. On va suggérer. La suggestion est ce qui permet à la fois d'obéir à la loi et à l'interdit et de les transgresser en montrant l'objet fantasmatique par excellence, qui, normalement, ne devrait pas être vu.

*P.G.: Est-ce là que le "regard détourné" et le rôle du spectateur vont jouer?*

D: Dans les *Salons* de Diderot, le salonnier ou le critique éprouve le besoin de présenter les œuvres de peinture dont il rend compte comme des scènes qui à la fois vont susciter le désir de regarder, et d'autre part, vont provoquer l'horreur d'autres personnages. Mais, lui, Diderot ou nous, lecteurs de Diderot, nous sommes à la fois les deux, c'est-à-dire nous avons envie de regarder et nous savons que nous sommes aux limites de ce qui est regardable, donc nous avons besoin de penser que c'est interdit. Par conséquent, le "regard détourné" est à la fois ce qu'on veut voir et ce qu'il ne faut pas voir.

*P.G.: Est-ce en fait ce regard qui fait le lien entre le terrible et l'érotique chez Diderot?*

D: Absolument. D'ailleurs Diderot définit bien le sublime comme des idées terribles entrelacées avec des images charmantes ou des images du désir. Lui-même, il le pense; il le dit. D'autant plus que dans ses *Salons*, vous avez un décalage supplémentaire entre ce qui peut être montré dans un tableau pictural et ce qui peut être dit dans un tableau scriptural. Donc, il joue, je crois, sur d'une part le désir de voir et l'interdit et, d'autre part, sur la façon de montrer en peinture, en sculpture et dire en écriture. Il y a un recouvrement de ces deux tensions.

*P.G.: Peut-être ces deux tensions se retrouvent-elles dans ses œuvres. Par exemple dans La Religieuse. Comment l'idée du tableau se constitue-t-elle dans le récit et quel est le rôle du spectateur?*

D: On a montré que Diderot s'était inspiré pour écrire *La Religieuse* de la grande peinture religieuse du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle, en particulier de Le Sueur qu'il connaissait bien et qu'il appréciait. C'est en ayant à l'esprit...en ayant l'habitude de ces toiles, qu'il décrit un certain nombre de scènes...

Si Diderot s'inspire de cette grande peinture religieuse, c'est pour obtenir le maximum d'effet pathétique. Ce qui l'intéresse dans *La Religieuse*, c'est la capacité de frapper ainsi les imaginations et d'obtenir un effet. Alors, Diderot ne l'utilise pas dans un sens proprement mystique ou religieux, mais pour frapper son lecteur et pour le mettre en situation de croire aux malheurs de la pauvre Suzanne Simonin. Mais alors que dans *La Religieuse* le tableau vise le pathétique, il peut dans d'autres romans de Diderot avoir un usage différent. Dans *Jacques le fataliste*, par exemple, le tableau est présent. Le texte de manière méta-textuel fait dialoguer sur le tableau. Là, c'est une scène libertine, ironique, gaillarde. Tous ces problèmes du tableau correspondent bien à un époque où les fictions vont être systématiquement illustrées. C'est-à-dire que les livres de fiction dans la deuxième moitié du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle ou au début du 19<sup>e</sup> sont de plus en plus fréquemment illustrés. L'illustration coûte moins chère à ce moment-là et c'est le moment aussi où l'illustration de tête, le frontespice, change de statut. Traditionnellement, cela avait un statut allégorique et de plus en plus le frontespice représente une scène particulière: la scène qui est tableau; la scène qui est la plus pathétique ou la représentation la plus ironique de l'ensemble de la fiction.

P.G.: *L'illustration, et surtout la gravure est aussi importante dans la littérature pornographique de l'époque. D'après Jean Goulemot, tout dans le roman pornographique se fonde sur le regard. En comparaison avec le tableau diderotien, comment ce tableau "pornographique" se déploie-t-il et en quoi diffère le rôle du spectateur?*

D: Je crois que le fonctionnement est assez proche. Mais, dans le texte pornographique, la limite n'est pas la même. On va aller plus loin. On va montrer plus de choses. Mais, même dans ces textes-là, il y a toujours besoin d'un au-delà. Il faut laisser imaginer des choses. On montre plus, mais quand on montre plus, on cache toujours quand-même malgré tout quelque chose.

*P.G.: L'idée de la cloison, par exemple, où un personnage regarde la scène comme un voyeur...*

D: Voilà, c'est ça. Dans le texte du 18<sup>e</sup> et encore au 20<sup>e</sup>, la production est surtout aujourd'hui cinématographique ou en vidéo, et fréquemment vous avez besoin, dans la fiction, de figurer la position du spectateur, du consommateur, et cette position est éfraction: il faut surprendre; il faut être indiscret. C'est-à-dire qu'on veut voir, mais on veut que ce qui est vu se dérobe. C'est aussi pour cela qu'à l'époque (au 18<sup>e</sup>) vous avez le genre le plus romanesque, qui a le plus de succès dans toute l'Europe; c'est le roman par lettres. On a l'impression que l'on lit par-dessus l'épaule des correspondants, que l'on surprend une correspondance particulière, intime, que l'on viole une intimité.

*P.G.: Par rapport à ces tableaux pornographiques où il y a toujours quelque chose laissé à l'imagination, comment fonctionnent ceux de Sade, où comme Barthes a remarqué, il n'y a plus de strip-tease. Les corps sont immédiatement dénudés...*

D: Barthes a en partie raison, mais seulement en partie car il y a aussi chez Sade des strip-tease. Ça, on pourrait le montrer, mais c'est autre chose. Alors, c'est ce que je disais. Sade est celui qui semble aller le plus loin en montrant tout, en ne cachant plus rien. Pourtant, chez Sade, vous avez le besoin de ce qu'il appelle "le cabinet secret." C'est-à-dire que des libertins qui pourtant n'ont plus aucun interdit, parfois ils s'enferment. Pour être seuls. Pour être cachés. Quelle est la fonction de ce "cabinet secret?" Eh bien, c'est une dernière et ultime cloison, ce qui permet que le lecteur voit tout, mais a quand même l'illusion que le texte va progresser; que tout voir n'épuise pas la totalité du thème. Il y a toujours un autre thème qui va plus loin. *Les Cent vingt journées de Sodom* sont construites sur cette progression de 120 journées, c'est-à-dire les quatre mois où de mois en mois on va aller de plus en plus loin. Si un jour on arrive au bout de l'horreur, eh bien, il n'y plus rien à dire; le texte s'arrête. Donc, le texte continue. Il y a une progression, et il y a une dynamique du regard, c'est-à-dire, du désir.

*P.G.: En ramenant cette idée de succession de scènes chez Sade à la notion de l'écriture, est-ce que vous diriez que cette machine est une machine désirante qui consitue le véritable producteur du tissu du texte?*

D: L'idée de machine suppose quelque chose qui marche tout seul. Le problème est de savoir s'il y a un mécanicien, un machiniste. Est-ce que Sade contrôle tout ce qu'il écrit ou non? Dans une certaine mesure, oui. Cette machine fonctionne comme la moteur à deux temps. Vous avez d'une part la scène, le tableau dont on vient de parler. Mais il y a également les grandes dissertations théoriques; la scène proprement sexuelle et puis le discours plus abstrait qui est une façon de justifier ce qui vient de se passer ou ce qui va se passer.

*P.G.: Comme les discours philosophiques ont tendance à arriver au milieu d'une scène, n'ont-ils pas plutôt tendance à ralentir la progression de l'action?*

D: Oui. Je crois que ça a une fonction du suspens, d'attente, de tension, d'alternance, qui permet au spectateur de se reposer et au texte de poursuivre. Alors, un texte comme *Les Cent vingt journées de Sodomi* n'est pas construit sur cette alternance, mais presque toutes les autres œuvres de Sade, en particulier *Justine*, *Juliette* et *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* supposent cette alternance du philosophique et du sexuel, du tableau et de la dissertation, de ce qui est fait et de ce qui est dit. De cette manière, cette alternance est aussi une représentation d'un mode de lecture possible du texte de Sade. On ne lit pas le texte de Sade par l'abstrait, donc cela figure aussi le rapport au lecteur.

*P.G.: Une dernière question. Si dans la littérature pornographique le lecteur est nécessairement voyeur, comment pourriez-vous caractériser le rôle du lecteur de Sade?*

D: C'est vrai que c'est difficile. Par exemple, quand on lit *Les Cent vingt journées*, c'est vrai qu'au début on peut être pris comme un complice, et puis très vite on est horrifié. Donc, la connivence ne peut pas durer. On peut être un certain temps voyeur, complice, et au bout d'un certain temps on devient, je crois, voyeur-victime. On est plutôt du côté des victimes, et c'est cela la force de Sade, sans non plus que je sache qu'il a contrôlé, parfaitement programmé cela ou non. Sa force est de nous provoquer et de provoquer chez nous des impressions contradictoires. On est, comme tout à l'heure quand nous parlions de Diderot, à la fois émus ou bien sexuellement, ou bien en général littéralement, esthétiquement, et puis horrifiés. On ne peut ignorer la force de Sade et la force de son imaginaire, et en même temps, en tant qu'individus du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle, citoyens des pays

civilisés, on ne peut pas ne pas être horrifiés et révoltés. D'où le malaise qui fait que son œuvre reste une œuvre limite. Je sais que c'est une formule qu'on emploie souvent, une formule qui semble banale. Mais je crois que réellement c'est un auteur qui se situe aux limites et de la représentation et de la communication.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See the following editions by Michel Delon: *De L'Encyclopédie aux Méditations*, 1750-1820, Eds. M. Delon, R. Mauzi and S. Menant (Paris: Arthaud, 1984); *P.-A. Choderlos de Laclos*, *Les liaisons dangereuses*, coll. Etudes Littéraires (Paris: PUF, 1986); *L'Idée d'énergie au tournant des Lumières*, 1770-1820, coll. Littératures modernes (Paris: PUF, 1988); *Œuvres de Sade*, coll. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1990, 1995); *Littérature française du XVIIIe siècle*, eds. M. Delon, P. Malandin, coll. Premier cycle (Paris: PUF, 1996).





## Closeted Metaphors, or Reading Identity in *A la recherche du temps perdu*

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Stacy Meeker

The young narrator in *Du côté de chez Swann* follows the course of the Vivonne with its *nymphéas* and crystal waters in his idealistic pursuit of the myth of the Guermantes only to discover many years later a "Vivonne mince et laide au bord du chemin de halage," whose source is not the romantic fount he had imagined but "une espèce de lavoir carré où montaient des bulles" (4: 267-68). Readers of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Marcel Proust's *roman-fleuve*, encounter the same problems of perception, identity and time as we navigate a current that holds countless surprises for even its most seasoned travelers and that teems with enough flora and fauna to satisfy the most exacting naturalist. While the stream remains difficult to chart, certain creative mapping attempts such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet," from her larger work, *Epistemology of the Closet*, not only explore essential problematics within the novel, but reveal fundamental problems at the root (to switch metaphors briefly) of Proust criticism.

The focus of Sedgwick's analysis is the dramatic first episode of male homosexual encounter between Charlus and Jupien, which is described initially in terms of the organic metaphor of the fertilization of orchids only to give way to an amplified discussion of sexual "inversion." The segment can be and has been read quite negatively, and Sedgwick openly tackles the scene "from the relatively decentered perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory" (Sedgwick 1). The metaphor of the homosexual closet both structures her deftly wrought rhetorical strategy and serves as an investigative tool which she intends to use to interrogate power relations between the observed Charlus and Jupien ("the spectacle of the closet" [Sedgwick 222]) and the observing, narrating *je* ("the viewpoint of the closet" [223]) and to explore the critical ground between what she calls J.E. Rivers's "minoritizing" view and Leo Bersani's "universalizing" view of the revelatory scene. However, while Sedgwick's innovative, timely, and powerful epistemological figure of the closet focuses our attention on

hitherto diffuse dynamics interanimating homophobia, epistemology, and the performative aspect of the text, her articulation of this figure, too heavily freighted with the connotative baggage of an "engaged" reading, ultimately encloses identity within fixed ontological boundaries and shuts the door on the much more complex epistemological considerations suggested by the architecture of the entirety of Proust's construction.

Sedgwick chooses to isolate the text of "Sodom I" from the rest of the novel in a reenactment of what she terms to be "the dramas of dismemberment" of the novel performed by Rivers and Bersani (215). Moving quickly through her interpretation of their criticisms of this passage, Sedgwick arrives at a characterization of this scene as full of "negative stereotypes" (Rivers), "banal," and "sentimental and reductive" (Bersani). She adds to the mix her suggestion that this episode is at the same time "the—catalytic node" for the rest of the novel (216-17), and with the better part of the textual body thus amputated, she focuses on this episode as the privileged locus of "sheer representational anxiety" (217) and of homo/heterosexual power negotiations. She then perceptively demonstrates the difficulty of resolving the lengthy central orchid-bee metaphor, inspired by the presence of orchids in the courtyard, which is used to describe the encounter of the two men as the "autofécondation" of two orchids by the third-party "bourdon," for, in spite of the fact that Charlus and Jupien are at times both figured as women, Sedgwick notes, "one orchid is still just plain male, the other just plain female" (220).

Despite her claim that the subject of her reading will be the "performative" aspect of the text, or how the reader is "constituted by and through the text" (223), and her axiomatic definition of the Narrator as homophobic (a non-homophobic narrating *je* is not "even... optional" [223]), her desire to define *A la recherche* as the "coming out story that doesn't come out" (248) leads her to go to some pains to discover the "nature" of this voyeur-Narrator within the constraints of the orchid-bee paradigm while the reader-relation remains comparatively untheorized.

In order to take into account both "negative" and "sentimental" elements of the scene together with the metaphor's inconsistencies, which she characterizes as a "red herring" (220), "creative mislabelings" and "'bad faith'" (242), she manipulates Proust's metaphor and frames her double closet as a more impenetrable



substitute. Unable to "solve" the metaphorical puzzle by definitively assigning stable referents to the female and male orchids as well as the bee component of the metaphor, she artfully removes the bothersome bee by assigning its role to her Narrator. With her Narrator thus rhetorically mapped onto the metaphor, she can, with the aid of present-day socio-political exempla and (her own autobiographical) empowerment through reading, interpret the undecidability of the image as revelatory of "homosexual panic" (20), deliberate and deflected unknowing on the part of a unified, single Narrator, and thus closeted (homo)sexual identity in Proust.

Artful though Sedgwick's strategy may be, it nonetheless does not demonstrate the necessity of an exclusively homophobic Narrator to a reading of the metaphor-enigmas that not only infiltrate but compose the text. By merely linking her justification of a homophobic Narrator to metaphorical representation that opens up "conceptual abysses" (220) of undecidability in the representation of "inversion," Sedgwick risks running aground on a logical reversal of her scheme. If undecidability or an excess of content amounts to pathological homophobia, then decidability or successful taxonomizing would constitute "normalcy," a notion strictly at odds with an antihomophobic reading. By insisting on restricting her own analysis to a spatial metaphor confined to two states-of-being—the closeted and the outed—she effectively confines her reading to "ontologies" of pre-existing closeted categories to the detriment of the relationships among the multiple perspectives subtly articulated Proust's work. Such a two-dimensional approach overlooks the inherent problematics of the text's temporal aspect, which is so blatantly obvious in Proust that it perhaps tends to be forgotten.

Paradoxically, the rhetorical device of the double closet reinforces Sedgwick's text while it weakens her reading. Its very structuring gesture causes her to sweep bothersome questions of metaphorical representation's relationship to identity and epistemology in the Proustian text itself under the rug. The axiomatic qualification of the *je* as homosexual/phobic serves as a powerful strategic move that coerces rather than persuades readers that they must adopt Sedgwick's privileged reading of the otherwise undecipherable text or remain trapped in the "homosexual panic" of homophobia. While postmodernism and "weak thought" have lead us to despair of finding an objective position with respect to

literary texts, Sedgwick's own deliberately marginalized position is suspect for two reasons: it fails to recognize its own "closet" metaphor as productive of a highly determined and deterministic reading, and it tends to evacuate specific significance from Proust's text in the service of exterior political motivations. The particular problem in our discussion is to evaluate Sedgwick's depiction of the relationship between the narrating voice(s) and metaphorical labelling both within the scene of "Sodom I" and in the larger context of the novel's three thousand pages.

Sedgwick's critical text serves as a curious rhetorical double to the Proustian master text such that effective disabling of metaphorical mesmerism in one implies the demythologization of the other. If the "Narrator" is "lying" in a system of metaphorical labelling, the project of definitive "naming" can never be more than utopian. The obsession with naming, or empowerment through knowing, is clearly thematized in the first part of the novel, "Nom du pays: le nom." We follow the young *je*'s obsession with names and the fanciful associations he creates around them for lack of better information only to discover that these associations are in fact limited or erroneous. In "Métonymie chez Proust," Gérard Genette demonstrates the role of metonymy in creating metaphors in *A la recherche*: the young *je* assumes that chance-contiguous relationships constitute identities that he later discovers to have been constructions. The imagery surrounding the names, however erroneous or disparate, tends to cohere into overarching metaphorical representations that will transmute and travel to the end of the novel; hence the Guermantes, for example, acquire a fluvial cast because of their association with their riverside property. Names are evocative metonymies for people and places and can become entire categories in the Proustian scheme of society and mapping, especially when the threads of earlier metaphorical texts are picked up again. However, these relationships are not confined to the thematic representations in the mind of the *je*, for relationships of place can give way to purely textual relationships.

Sedgwick rightly observes that textual eruptions or moments of "representational anxiety" are key to understanding the reader's relationship (mediated through the narrating *je*) to the text, but her flat definition of this anxiety as the essential characteristic of the Narrator obscures the more subtle representational and epistemo-

logical considerations of this key scene. Sedgwick defines "closetedness" as "a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence—not a particular silence, but a silence...in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (3). While it is a risky move to define silence even relationally, Sedgwick's recognition of context nonetheless points to the need to reconstruct the anatomy of the dismembered textual body and to consider the performances enacted in the relationships among various and even competing discourses and figures that produce ironic and telling textual disruptions.

The revelatory first portion of "Sodom I" is not merely a battleground of defensive homophobic "ballistics" (222) but rather the dramatization of naming and knowing carefully prepared by the orchid discussion at the end of *Du côté de Guermantes*. The work of "classifying," which in Sedgwick's terms is an identification with the "the medical expert" granting access to the "ironclad epistemological receivership" (225) of the "authority" to describe, begins here with the young *je* cast in the role of principal observer in this theater of discovery. However, the comic depiction of the young *je*, whose botanical project is repeatedly ridiculed through hyperbolic representation, skews the "sight lines" (213) defining the paranoid viewing closet and the spectacular closet and troubles the mapping of the "highly invested" (221) bumble bee. We must ask not only what he thinks, but how he is represented in order to determine his real function and to evaluate the quality of his understanding of the scene.

The narrating *je* himself describes the hero-*je* as a "botaniste" (3:3), but this classification is implicitly only positional, for moments before, this generalist "expert" held the position of a "géologue." If the authoritative gaze implies a vertical hierarchy of knowing and naming in Sedgwick's logic, the relative positioning of the young *je* in the staging of this scene does not inspire confidence in his ability to define and understand what he sees, for we know from the outset that the hero-*je* has descended from his "séjour d'altitude" (3:3) before the action and his observation begin. The hero-*je*, a foolish boy who bolsters his courage in the face of the revelation of Sodom by asserting directly (and improbably) that he "'vien[t] d'avoir plusieurs duels sans aucune crainte, à cause de l'affaire Dreyfus'" (3:10), admittedly displays emotion and lack of caution scarcely suitable for biologist or geologist.

It is possible to say that the hero-*je* falls victim to defensive description on the part of the narrating *je*, who is the real authority, as an alibi for his own exemption from the scene. However, if the narrating *je* subjects the role of classifier to ridicule and is himself in the process of classifying, he implicitly undermines the authority of the "taxonomic gaze" (227) as locus of efficacious power. The limits of knowledge reveal themselves in the long-term effects of the discovery of Sodom on the young *je*, who is later unable to use his new knowledge to better conduct his relations with Albertine while the text itself points to figurative language as a key to understanding the role of naming.

A conjunction of botany (or ontological classification), and writing (or epistemology) emerges from the syllepsis of the word "styles," highlighted by quotation marks (3:5), toward the beginning of the scene, for here the "styles" of the orchid are linked to the style of the text. We are not only alerted to the question of textuality but also to the fact that the writing *je* may have a different attitude toward his subject matter than the hero-*je*. The multiple valences at work in this scene serve to confront the notion of aesthetic representation with that of reporting. Thus, while the observations internalized by the hero-*je* help to constitute the raw material of the text, the depiction and function of this *je* and his attitudes as well as the obvious instances of comic distance from him help to reveal not only the limitations of his understanding, but of epistemological projects and products in general. Throughout the scene the spectre of textuality breaks through the surface of the narration to make us aware of what metaphors are being used and when and even of how we should read the text. The substitution of the metaphor for reality in the description, for example, becomes complete at the moment at which "la porte de la boutique se referma sur eux et je ne pus plus rien entendre. J'avais perdu de vue le bourdon..." only to be immediately distanced from it once again by the narrating *je*'s observation that this was a "simple comparaison...sans la moindre prétention scientifique de rapprocher certaines lois de la botanique et ce qu'on appelle parfois fort mal l'homosexualité..." (3:9).

The difficult-to-situate power relations between narrating and acting *je*'s are not only a complication of the *je*'s "identity." They dramatize the problem of the power (or lack thereof) of classification itself. A condition of classificatory confusion also contami-



nates Charlus who, availing himself of the vocabulary of medicine, says that in pursuing a young man he jumps,

comme un petit professeur, comme un jeune et beau médecin, dans le même tramway que la petite personne, dont nous ne parlons au féminin que pour suivre la règle (comme on dit en parlant d'un prince: Est-ce que Son Altesse est bien portante?). Si elle change de tramway, je prends, avec peut-être les microbes de la peste, la chose incroyable appelée "correspondance".... (3:12)

Here, Charlus doubly classifies himself through comparison as a "professeur" and a "médecin," thus assuming the position of authority held by the "botaniste." He may "saute," but his ability, like that of the *hero-je*, is not vertically superior, for he is enclosed within the space of a tramway, which he changes three or four times without ever reaching the object of his quest (3:12). Just as he was depicted as an orchid because of the presence of a nearby flower, he implicitly classifies others by metonymy as "les microbes de la peste," and he refers to a "petit bourgeois" (perhaps a veiled reference to our "hero") as both a "microscopique vibrion" and a "petit âne" (3:14). He is not, however, altogether unaware of the linguistic implications of his classifications, for he understands the contrary and conventional "règle" of grammar and signification that governs the designation of gender. If we accept Sedgwick's view that he represents a double for her homophobic Narrator, we see the enactment here of the reader-relation that perhaps reveals the potential pitfalls for our own readings when he remarks to Jupien, "Je vois que les métaphores vous laissent sourd et l'histoire de la France indifférent" (3:14).

The "essay" on inverts which follows the dramatization of the scene of conjunction between Charlus and Jupien lacks the comic tone of the scene partially because the dwindling of the drama constitutes a move away from scenicity itself and (hence the removal of the convenient exterior objects, which constitute the narration's motivation for representation), and the discussion relies on earlier metaphors to generate further interest in observations that, according to Rivers, do not stand up to the test of scientific knowledge or even rigorous logic. Rather, the discussion of inverts and Jews can be seen as the aftermath of epistemological revelation that continues to demand explanations inherently linked

with language. The young *je* sees the moment as one of clear definition of identity, whereas the writing *je* thematizes the effects of the metaphorical cliché in perception and the representation of identity in terms of the happy example (zoology having been introduced into the botanical paradigm with the bourdon) of the figure of speech, "'Quel chameau!'" (3:15). The example is offered as an illustration of the change of perspective occasioned, not by a move down the stairs, but by the simple invocation of a figural expression:

Rien, sur le visage privé de caractères de tel ou tel homme, ne pouvait...faire supposer qu'il était précisément le frère, ou le fiancé, ou l'amant d'une femme dont elles [quelques personnes] allaient dire: "Quel chameau!" Mais alors, par bonheur, un mot que leur chuchote un voisin arrête sur leurs lèvres le terme fatal. Aussitôt apparaissent, comme un Mané, Thécél, Pharès, ces mots: il est le fiancé, ou il est le frère, ou il est l'amant de la femme qu'il ne convient pas d'appeler devant lui: "chameau". Et cette seule notion entraînera tout un regroupement, le retrait ou l'avance de la fraction des notions, désormais complétées, qu'on possédait sur le reste de la famille. (3:15-16)

The sudden revelation of the "identity" of the men in terms of their relationship (at one remove) to a metaphorical expression mimics that of the revelation of the homosexual in terms of the perception of the observer. The contingent figure of speech or "psychologie de convention" (3:17) that introduces the category of "chameau" does not reveal an essential nature but rather retrospectively reorganizes impressions to construct a new "understanding" of identity. The "races" of homosexual and Jew, which both bear an uncomfortable resemblance in their constitution to the category of "chameau," do not, however, coexist comfortably as principles of identity in the text's dramatization of metaphorical classification. The invert Charlus's violently antisemitic diatribe against "l'afflux de messieurs et de dames du Chameau, de la Chamellerie, de la Chamellerie..." (2:586) effectively puts the two "races maudites" at cross-purposes. In the light of the example of the figurative use of the word "chameau," identities emerge as perceived categories, and naming is often name-calling, as we can clearly see in Odette's anecdote about one Mme Blatin's unfortunate greeting of "Bonjour,

négro!" to a Cinghalais at the Jardin d'Acclimatation who retorts: "Moi négro...mais toi, chameau!" (1:526).

The thematization of writing and the introduction of a new ontological category of homosexuality has been analyzed by Marcel Muller ("La naturalisation de Charlus"), and the role of homosexuality in conjunction with Jewishness as a structuring discourse in the novel has been discussed by Jeanne Bem. However, while the new category of the homosexual dramatically furthers the narrative and even gives it new life, and in some ways new clarity, it merely complicates the epistemological problem signaled by Sedgwick's "mislabellings." The bastion of authority on which the reader and Sedgwick's Narrator stand is poorly fortified. If the work becomes more coherent in terms of its representation and mythological consistency, it loses credibility in terms of "real," objective knowledge, because once the categories are sorted out, they prove to have moveable boundaries that allow the intersection with other categories.

Even if Charlus's authority to describe others is suspect because he cannot describe himself (224), the text offers us expert witnesses with the proper credentials by which we can judge the classificatory discourses established in the novel. Sedgwick contends that "the narrator's presentations of Charlus persist in reaching out toward an appeal to, and identification with, the medical expert" (224). The expert voice that echoes in our ears is that of Cottard, a "prince de la science" (3:304). The foolish Every Scientist, the ubiquitous Cottard reifies the unreliable mutations wrought by figurative language and pathology. The high visibility accorded to the new rubric of the invert implies a motivation for a greater role for the medical expert whose increasing interactions with Charlus are both comic and telling. A category unto himself, he is classified in the space of two pages as, "Tel homme," "d'innombrables Cottard," "Un Cottard," and "De nombreux Cottard" (3: 273-75), a species which nonetheless intersects that of the "invert." His own nephew by marriage is effeminate (3:299), he constitutes a bizarre "double" for Charlus as the Baron's second in the fictive duel with Morel, and as the object of Charlus's *œillades*, he is mistakenly classified as an invert (by "one" who should "know one," according to Sedgwick [222]).

However, he is also a classifier who shows himself to be spectacularly unable to control social language and to diagnose

metaphorical pathologies. Naming might be said to be Cottard's principal concern, for "il ne laissait jamais passer soit une locution ou un nom propre qui lui étaient inconnus, sans tâcher de se faire documenter" (1:197). However, despite his ineptitude, his comically omnipotent scientific expertise spreads uncontrolled like a cancer into the linguistic, for Brichot asks him,

Dites donc, Cottard, vous semble-t-il que la neurasthénie puisse avoir une fâcheuse influence sur la philologie, la philologie une influence calmante sur la neurasthénie, et la guérison de la neurasthénie conduire au rhumatisme?—Parfaitement, le rhumatisme et la neurasthénie sont deux formes vicariantes du neuro-arthritisme. On peut passer de l'une à l'autre par métastase (3:284)

In this case, while Cottard should be associated with a hierarchically privileged position of control, his authority to understand and diagnose is staged instead as chronic ineptitude whose presence is so entrenched that it cannot be localized, diagnosed, or excised. Thanks to his allusive and imprecise language, Mme Cottard erroneously concludes that "M. de Charlus devait être un Israélite bavard" (3:426). Because of her own misunderstanding of Charlus' language, she thinks "'C'est un fanatique'" (3:427). The contagion spreads even to the *hero-je*, for an incident as serious as the narrator's first suspicion about Albertine's "genre" ironically "naquit d'une remarque de Cottard" (3:190), a fool who frames the scene at the casino at Incarville.

The authoritative gaze of the linguistically bumbling and satirically represented Cottard does not coincide with that of the novelist-*je*, who demonstrates a deft touch with irony that highlights the rhetorical nature of understanding. Sedgwick indicates that "M. de Charlus is the novel's most ravishingly consumable product" (223)—perhaps an unconscious invocation on her part of Jupien's reply to Charlus that he has "un cœur d'artichaut" (3:11)—and this consumability recalls the parodic representation of M. Nissim Bernard, a notoriously Jewish and homosexual figure in the novel, and his confused encounters with twin brothers, one an "invert" and the other straight, who remarkably resemble two tomatoes:



Non loin de nous était M. Nissim Bernard, lequel avait un œil poché. Il trompait depuis peu l'enfant des chœurs d'Athalie avec le garçon d'une ferme assez achalandée du voisinage, *Aux Cerisiers*. Ce garçon rouge, aux traits abrupts, avait absolument l'air d'avoir comme tête une tomate. Une tomate exactement semblable servait de tête à son frère jumeau. Pour le contemplateur désinintéressé, il y a cela d'assez beau dans ces ressemblances parfaites de deux jumeaux que la nature, comme si elle s'était momentanément industrialisée, semble débiter des produits pareils. Malheureusement, le point de vue de M. Nissim Bernard était autre et cette ressemblance n'était qu'extérieure. La tomate n° 2 se plaisait avec frénésie à faire exclusivement les délices des dames, la tomate n° 1 ne détestait pas condescendre aux goûts de certains messieurs. Or chaque fois que secoué ainsi que par un réflexe, par le souvenir des bonnes heures passées avec la tomate n° 1, M. Bernard se présentait *Aux Cerisiers*,...le vieil Israélite jouant sans le savoir Amphytrion s'adressait au frère jumeau et lui disait: "Veux-tu me donner rendez-vous pour ce soir?" Il recevait aussitôt une solide "tournée." Elle vint même à se renouveler au cours d'un même repas, où il continuait avec l'autre, les propos commencés avec le premier. A la longue elle le dégouta tellement, par association d'idées, des tomates, même de celles comestibles, que chaque fois qu'il entendait un voyageur en commander à côté de lui au Grand-Hôtel, il lui chuchotait: "Excusez-moi, Monsieur, de m'adresser à vous, sans vous connaître. Mais j'ai entendu que vous commandiez des tomates. Elles sont pourries aujourd'hui. Je vous le dis dans votre intérêt car pour moi cela m'est égal, je n'en prends jamais." (3:249)

Here we have the response to the Charlus-Jupien-orchid metaphor or, perhaps more appropriately, its fraternal twin. The fruit of the rare orchid pollination is a garden-variety tomato, mass-produced to the power of two, and cousin to the cherries of its locus of origin, *Aux Cerisiers*. The botanical extends to the category of the alimentary ("celles comestibles") which subdivides into simple vegetarian ("tomates") and ovo-lacto ("œil poché" inspires "œuf poché"). The garden trope, although a guarantor of meaning on the textual level, is "true" only on the linguistic level, because even if Charlus and Jupien are able to read each others's signs, the "inversion" of one tomato and the "normalcy" of the other are not legible on their surfaces. Nor do their gestures apparently reveal them. Thus, if one were to take the Charlus-Jupien metaphor as evidence of a totalizing essentialist characterization of homosexuality, be it nega-

tive or positive, one would fly in the face of this rather pointed *dédoublement*. M. Bernard's Jewish identity further complicates the image, for instead of recognizing his marginal cousin the invert, which we would suppose possible from the analogy drawn between Jew and homosexual, a presumably recognizable composite category, he gets punched in the eye for his trouble. And finally, even though we readers would be so much more suave than the unhappy M. Nissim Bernard, we learn that "*la myopie n'était pas nécessaire pour les confondre*" (3:248) and that we probably would not have fared much better in distinguishing them.

Michael Riffaterre treats this hyperbolic representation at length in his discussion of humor as an index of fictionality (38-40). He characterizes the tomatoes as "the terminal and highest point of a paradigm" of metaphorical representations (38). It is with respect to this metaphor that the orchid-bee metaphor creatively metamorphosed into the closet metaphor by Sedgwick can be effectively judged. As each of the categories of identity and classification in the tomato metaphor itself proves to be ineffective both thematically and representationally as means to the end of understanding, the notion of categories altogether becomes an issue of representation as opposed to essence. An ironic extrapolation of the orchid metaphor and the subsequent discussion of inverts and Jews in "Sodom I," the tomatoes undermine the "legitimate" categories of fin-de-siècle science's classifications of Jews and homosexuals, and they reveal the suspicious nature of taxonomic projects like the orchid-bee metaphor. Not only is the emblematic Nissim Bernard's system of knowing thematically put into question, but the stability of the reader's understanding is also destabilized by textual self-referentiality.

Although the metaphor of the two tomatoes is undeniably comic and ironically satirizes the reading of signs and categories, perhaps an equally great significance lies in its illustration of the implicit relationship between both the "dramatic" and "non-referential" notions of performance which Sedgwick's stance with respect to reader-relations suggests but fails to explore and fully articulate. Judith Butler's notion of identity as "an enacted fantasy or incorporation" (136) that is performed as "an effect of a corporeal signification" (136) coupled with that of subversive repetition of parody (136-37), renders the metaphor particularly meaningful

for the discussion of identity on a general epistemological level and suggests that epistemology itself is a matter of signs. The tomato metaphor pushes classificatory systems to their logical limits by clothing sexual preference in a form of overt botanical drag that extends beyond the limits of the human species. The both dramatic and non-referential nature of the categories in the metaphor reveals the constructed nature of the understanding of identity in contrast to a fixed understanding of essential ontological categories.

For the reader, whose reaction or impression is the real "business of literary art" according to Riffaterre's reading of Proust (39), this construction becomes noticeable at this locus, which qualifies as one of Sedgwick's performative "sites of definitional creation, violence and rupture in relation to particular readers" (3). Even if readers do experience an identification with the relatively powerful position of the comic narrating voice, the intrusion of textual fictionality requires us to reexamine the status of the seemingly objective, diagnostic description that it ironizes and destabilizes our faith in our modes of "understanding." Just as silence itself cannot be readily characterized and identified, the non-representational as such resists definite characterization. Silences on the part of the narrator with respect to his own sexuality or involvement in the myriad events in the novel do not necessarily (or necessarily fail to) signify homosexual panic. Rather, we do not recognize homosexual panic on the part of a Narrator so much as the inadequacy of our own ability to know, despite the drama of the revelations. Just as the young hero's ability to cope with "inversion" as a category is not enhanced but rather confused (particularly in the case of Albertine), more information does not necessarily result in greater understanding. The defective nature of knowledge and understanding is made evident by the element of Time during our experience with the text and would not be as obvious in a reading confined to the first metaphorical representation, that of the orchids and the bee.

The most powerful readerly identification with the text is the desire to know, a desire which is thematized and foiled from the opening paragraphs of the novel. The epistemology of the text, which we can see as one intimately linked with representation, lies squarely in the crux of the difference between "meaning" and "performance" that Sedgwick invokes, for the narrating *je* repre-

sents all manner of knowledge to us, and yet the particulars of this knowledge continue to remain mobile, contingent, and even contradictory. We know that homosexuality is increasingly present in the text, and yet the impossible-to-locate definition of homosexuality that slides between object choice and inner gender manifested by the Charlus-Albertine pairing does not allow us a fixed privileged position from which to spot, much less predict, the next occurrence of "coming out." We are rather relegated to the increasingly paranoid position of the hero-*je* who desires to know and who cannot find out. At the same time, the omissions of the narrator-*je* who does not label himself suggest an identification with the reader who has no resort but to define him or herself in terms of the equally unstable and suspect "adjectival communities" (Sedgwick 229) constituted by the novel. The danger posed by the text, however, is that the absence of stable categories and the free circulation of "adjectives" renders the reader susceptible to all of the possible categories represented. The spectacle of the closet is in fact emblematic of the specular nature of the text which effectively puts everyone into a closet that will always mark the limits of our ability to know.

Structurally speaking, the system of differences established in *A la recherche* muddles the rubrics of conventional identity, for just when we seem to have discovered the "key" to one category, another possibility springs forth. Genette notes that the Proustian character is:

une figure à plusieurs plans dont l'incohérence finale n'est qu'une somme d'excessives cohérences partielles: il y a ainsi plusieurs Saint-Loup, plusieurs Rachel, plusieurs Albertine incompatibles et qui s'entredétruisent. ("Proust Palimpsest" 53-54)

People not only display conflicting impulses; they take each other's places in society: la Verdurin becomes la Princesse de Guermantes; Rachel quand du Seigneur, an artistic failure at a Guermantes salon, becomes the hit of the *matinée*; *la dame en rose* becomes Odette, who becomes Mme Swann, then Mme de Fourcheville; the elegant Charlus becomes ridiculous and outmoded. Everything changes except death and the transcendence of Art, and it is Charlus who takes inventory of the dead "sur un ton uniforme, légèrement bégayant et aux sourdes résonances sépulcrales:



'Hannibal de Bréauté, mort! Antoine de Mouchy, mort! Charles Swann, mort!...' (4:441). Or, in the words of la Patronne herself who comments on the first death of Cottard, the most enduring of the fidèles of the petit clan: "Hé bien oui, qu'est-ce que vous voulez, il est mort, comme tout le monde..." (3:746).

Sedgwick's deliberately paranoid position, buttressed in advance against potential attacks by the "machinery of heterosexual presumption and homophobic projection" (247) behind the voices speaking of "undecidability," would not be objectionable if it brought to light hidden operations in the text itself. However, its forceful construction is its undoing as a truly critical mechanism, for in her effort to eliminate the possibilities of other interpretations, Sedgwick defines away the problematic aspects of the text that pose perhaps the most interesting questions. The consequence of a logic whose articulation relies too heavily upon characterizing her Narrator as unproblematic and merely homophobic rather than changeable and multi-valent is that such a Narrator can no longer logically inhabit a world in which the fourth dimension is that of Time and its multiple perspectives. According to the either/or dynamic of Sedgwick's view, we must suppose him to have a "true" identity that remains hidden throughout the work, an interpretation that in itself cannot account for the thematization of increasingly complex but ongoing misunderstanding. The persistent theme of the inadequacy of objective knowledge, so often represented parodically, would be lost in Sedgwick's particular closet, as would the complex representational flow of the text. One might advance a reading of the various metaphors as comprised of signs intelligible only by other invertis. However, even the emblematic homosexual Charlus can misread signs, mistaking Cottard for a fellow invert (3:310), or a young child for an adult partner in the *Temple de l'Impudeur*: "Comment...c'était donc la première fois?" (4:442).

Sedgwick's ostensible real interest in the text, and perhaps the one with the most potential for sounding its depths—the performative aspect in its relationship to the reader—is designated as a "truth-effect" but not truly theorized or discussed in terms of epistemology or the closet. Proust himself deals with the question of the reader's desires in the preface to his translation of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* in which he discusses his own wishful reading relationship to the author: "J'aurais voulu qu'il me dît, lui, le seul

sage détenteur de la vérité, ce que je devais penser...." ("Journées de lecture" 176). We might suggest, then, that the "truth effect" which Sedgwick pursues rather obliquely is in fact a necessary and brilliantly exploited paradox of Proustian prose: objectively taxonomized truth must be represented in order to continue to sustain desire for the aesthetic form in which it is contained even if it is ultimately refuted. As readers, we want to appropriate the text in its truth, and the representational richness of Proust's project seems to allow this. However, metaphors are mobile figures in Proust particularly because they are several and therefore recognizable as such; even the *je* of the *Recherche* poses at least two possible metaphors for his own work: "une robe" or "je n'ose pas dire ambitieusement...une cathédrale" (4:610). Just as Sedgwick's evocations of the figure of the closet rather aptly suggest that no one can ever "come out," this understanding of the epistemology in Proust does not come out in Sedgwick's reading, for her rhetorical strategy of the double-closet reveals precisely what it opted to hide, the highly ambiguous nature of metaphor and the dangers of closeted readings of Proust.

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## In the Shadow of the Sun King: The *Précieuse*

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Vanessa Herold

The seventeenth century French salon of the Marquise de Rambouillet played a decisive role in the development of social conduct. Within the Marquise's *chambre bleue*, members set new patterns for behavioral codes by refining the nuances of politeness, gallantry and above all, conversation. Two distinct modes of comportment, *honnêteté* and *préciosité*, evolved from the atmosphere of the blue room. However, their paths branched out in diverging directions. The *honnête homme* became the social ideal whereas the *précieuse* became an object of satire and ridicule. Male writers of the century, including Molière and the Abbé de Pure, mocked the *précieuse*'s imaginative language which clashed with the *honnête homme*'s sober manner. Without any texts from the hand of a woman claiming to be a *précieuse* or to defend her cause, *préciosité*'s legacy fell into the hands of its detractors.

The outpouring of satirical literature about the *précieuse* represented a response to a perceived threat.<sup>1</sup> Writers did not trivialize the *précieuse*'s character solely on the basis of her sex,<sup>2</sup> but rather on the fear of her challenge to the established political and social order. This article seeks to demonstrate the subversiveness of *préciosité* to a monarch who attempted to build glory on fabricated and artificial acts of distinction. The *précieuse* challenged Louis XIV, the "ultimate sign maker" (*Aristocrat* 129), by undermining his power base. Her discourse constructed new meanings between words and things, signs and referents.<sup>3</sup>

Louis XIV's self-transformation into the Sun King was contingent upon his subjects accepting his proposed artificial connections between signifier and signified. To stabilize his power, Louis XIV had to be the one who brought into existence images and meanings. At the beginning of Louis' personal rule in 1661, royal forces undertook the task of crushing all elements challenging the king's authority. This year marked the end of the cultural dominance of the salons and the symbolic death of the *précieuses*, both of which had been associated with the Fronde (1648-1653).<sup>4</sup> Louis XIV never forgot the threat of this civil war to his absolute reign.

In the aftermath of the Fronde, he sought to erase records of this war from the annals of French history, keeping only those facts that would increase his own power (Beasley 92). Official historians under royal authority helped to reduce the menace of the Fronde by ridiculing its participants, which included women.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the ridicule, the Fronde proved that women were capable of taking power into their own hands and revolting against the established laws. The leaders of the Fronde, such as Mme de Longueville, Mme de Châtillon and Mlle de Montpensier, took command, guiding armies into battle. They were joined by numerous other women, forcing their male contemporaries, including Mazarin, to realize that they were a force to be reckoned with during the war.<sup>6</sup> Pierres Georges Lorris, A. Lloyd Moote and other recent historians of the Fronde emphasize how close the Fronde came to altering permanently the course of the French monarchy. If the *frondeurs/frondeuses* had succeeded, Louis XIV's absolute rule might have been avoided. Their uprising was a constant reminder to the king of the potential threat of particular sectors of society to the public sphere. To preclude the repetition of the Fronde, Louis attempted to build an impenetrable hierarchy based on ceremonial mechanisms whose meanings he ultimately controlled.

To centralize his power and reduce the prestige of outside forces, Louis embarked on a program of gathering his nobility around him in one community and under one roof. The aristocracy flocked to the most magnificent court in Europe, simply because their personal honor depended on it. The nobles looked to the king for a definition of honorable conduct. Their dependence on Louis XIV turned them into symbolic prisoners. Every deed, gesture and word had to be in accordance with their master's wishes. Norbert Elias points out how the king turned the witnessing of his own private acts, such as that of taking off a nightshirt and putting on a dayshirt, into a privilege distinguishing those present from others (85). The opportunity of holding the king's candle at the *coucher*, or his shirt at the *lever* were purely symbolic distinctions that the *honnêtes gens* equated with honor. In such ceremonies, each participant became defined by his function in relation to others and to the king. Louis did not invent but rather enriched various traditional ceremonies by minute organization, giving each small act a graded prestige value, thereby providing more

outlets for meritorious expressions (85). Based on tradition, the distinguishing signs of honor had a persuasive reality for the aristocrats.

As the king transformed himself into Louis le Grand, he turned his palace into a stage for his guests. In this setting, Louis encouraged competition for prestige among the members of the *noblesse d'épée* and *noblesse de robe* to turn them away from competition for royal power, thereby preventing the possibility of another Fronde.<sup>7</sup> The new social style that formed at the court was reminiscent of the patterns of politeness designed by the Marquise de Rambouillet. However the extravagant fancies of the *précieuses* and their verbal excesses, developed during what Dorothy Backer terms as the "precious decade" (1654-1661), were to be left behind. The new ideal was the courtier who never became excited about anything. La Rochefoucauld defines the model: "Le vrai honnête homme est celui qui ne se pique de rien" (#203). The *juste milieu* expelled the excitement and lavishness of *préciosité*. Anything overdone, excessive or overflowing was not considered honorable, unless of course it was promoted by the king himself. Only Louis XIV could be dazzling. The moment when one overstepped his boundaries, such as Fouquet who built himself a palace grander than the king's, the individual was ridiculed or disgraced and, in Fouquet's case, imprisoned in 1661.

The king kept his nobles busy with mastering various social codes such as those of conversation. At the court, conversation became the primary vehicle for displaying one's being honorably. While speaking, one had to control gestures, facial expressions and body movements since every signifier was used as an expression of honor. According to Nicolas Faret, who wrote the first important work on *honnêteté*, *L'Honnête homme ou l'art de plaire à la cour* (1630), "L'une des plus importantes et des plus universelles maximes que l'on doit suivre en ce commerce, est de modérer ses passions..." (68). A person needed to discipline his body and his emotions in order not to lose his rank among his peers. Everything had to be calculated, including outbursts; any explosions revealing the true feelings of the person were perceived as signs of weakness. Thus, those seeking to enhance their social status had to master an artful behavior that appeared artless.

The deliberate artificiality of the *précieuse's* language and behavior defied the golden rule of appearing natural. Baudeau de

Somaize, a writer and self-proclaimed historian of these women, provides us insight into their character. The *précieuse*, he writes in his *Dictionnaire des précieuses* (1661), must possess *esprit*. But, he asks, are all women with wit or intelligence *précieuse*?

[Je] réponds à cette demande que non, et que ce sont seulement celles qui se meslent d'écrire ou de corriger ce que les autres écrivent, celles qui font leur principal de la lecture des romans, et sur tout celles qui inventent des façons de parler bizarres par leur nouveauté et extraordinaires dans leurs significations. (23)

For Somaize, the *précieuses* were truly learned and cultivated women, who knew as much about books as the authors they met. The fact that they spoke in a notorious language attracted attention and criticism.

In particular René Bary, a theoretician of social conduct, scrutinized the *précieuse's* style in a mocking tone. In his *Réflexions sur la politesse des mœurs* (1664), Bary contrasts the polite conduct of the honorable woman with the excessive comportment of the *précieuse*:

Il y a une grande difference entre la veritable politesse, & les petites façons que les Précieuses affectent, pour se donner un air de distinction. Leurs grimaces étudiées, leurs minauderies, cette fausse délicatesse, dont elles se parent, font rire les personnes raisonnables. (7)

Bary attacks the desire of the *précieuse* to distinguish herself through 'studied grimaces' in order to be superior in the eyes of others. The overt display of artifice, according to the precepts of *honnêteté*, connoted affectation. Unlike the *honnêtes hommes/femmes* who tried to hide their artifice, the *précieuse* willingly exposed it which made "reasonable people" laugh (7, translation mine).

In order to prevent women from deviating from the social ideal, courtesy literature or "how-to books" explained to women the proper ways to interact in social situations. Jacques du Bosc's *Honneste femme* (1632), for example, argued for the need for women to be educated in conversational rhetoric. However, he warned his readers of the difficulty of choosing the correct models to follow:

Comme il n'y a rien de plus important aux Dames, que de savoir choisir de bons Esprits pour la Conversation, et de bons Livres

pour la lecture, aussi n'y a-t-il rien de plus difficile, parce qu'il y a tant de mauvaises qui ressemblent aux bonnes. (28)

A woman had to carefully cultivate her connections in order to protect herself from the "mauvaises" influences of the *non-honnêtes gens*. It was as if the *honnête femme* were allowed neither to be ignorant nor to be learned. From this perspective, a woman's education needed to be supervised and controlled. Even though male advocates of female education, such as du Bosc, recognized woman's intellectual capacities and her fitness for non-domestic roles, they desired to control her learning. The *honnête femme* acquiesced to rigid formality, while the *précieuse* constructed her own rules.

Within the boundaries of the salon culture, the *précieuse* had the freedom to talk and express knowledge. In Michel de Pure's novel *La Prétieuse ou le mystère des ruelles* (1656-7), freedom signified the opportunity to display learning. Agathonte recommends a male friend, Philonime, to socialize with Eulalie, a woman of wit, to improve his poetry: "Eulalie, qui véritablement a autant d'esprit que personne du monde; [...] a encore une certaine grace à tourner ces imaginations, et à leur donner corps et expression, que l'on ne peut l'entendre sans l'admirer" (9-10). In the *précieux* circles of de Pure's fictional text, the learned lady did not have to hide her knowledge. Rather, poets and writers desired to earn her approval.

In the reality of the age of absolutism however, the honorable and chaste woman agreed to give up her freedom and succumb to authority. Power for a woman now resided in support for the king. It was to the king's good fortune when certain *précieux* writers, such as Madeleine de Scudéry, replaced the *précieux* pen for an *honnête* one. When Louis XIV granted Scudéry a royal pension in 1683, suddenly her works were no longer dedicated to illustrious women, but to the Sun King. Before the influence of Louis, Scudéry's earlier works, such as *Le Grand Cyrus*, portrayed the adventures of quasi-mythical *frondeurs* in exotic settings thrown in a jumble of episodes. She filled her story with portraits of her friends, including herself as Sapho, a character who advocated a number of archetypal "feminist" causes, including the idea of not marrying. In *Le Grand Cyrus*, Sapho retires to the *pays des Sauromates*, a utopia



where she remains unmarried with her lover, whom she dominates completely.

In contrast to her earlier "feminist" stance, Scudéry's last works were in line with the spirit of the age of Louis. In "De l'expérience," for example, Anacrise and Célinte debate about life in the *chambre bleue* versus that under the reign of Louis. Anacrise claims that she enjoys to hear old stories about the blue room: "J'écoute avec plaisir ce qu'était l'Hôtel de Rambouillet où tout ce qu'il y avait de grand, de brave, de savant, de galant, de poli, et de vertueux se trouvait." Célinte disagrees because she believes that nothing could equal the gay life under the present monarch: "ce que fait Louis le Grand m'occupe si agréablement et j'en ai l'esprit si rempli, qui je ne m'informe point de ce qui s'est fait avant lui..." (129). Evidently, Célinte did not choose the path of subversion, just like her author who willingly chose to succumb to absolute rule rather than promote the liberty of the salons. Instead of building up the myth of Sapho, Scudéry concentrated on patronizing the myth of Louis XIV.

Along with Scudéry, Molière worked in the king's favor. In keeping with the absolutism of the political reign, the classical authors were encouraged to become absolutists of taste (Backer 166). To them the *précieux* language was obscure and farfetched. A *précieuse* did not say for example, "Asseyez-vous, s'il vous plaît." According to Molière's *Les Précieuses ridicules*, a precious lady said, "Contentez, s'il vous plaît, l'envie que ce siege a de vous embrasser" (sc. IX). Even though Molière's play is a comedy and intentionally exaggerated, his creation is not an "*invention gratuite*" explains Roger Lathuillère: "Elle [la préciosité] repose sur des faits de langues véritables" ("*Langue*" 246). The characters of Molière speak the language of subversion. Molière iterates the *précieuses'* deviation when the maid exclaims that she cannot understand the monstrous speech of Cathos and Magdelon: "...il faut parler chrétien, si vous voulez que je vous entende" (sc. VI).

The *précieuse's* words appeared obscure because she used the non-material, abstract realm to describe material things. For instance, fingernails were referred to as "le plaisir innocent de la chair," jealousy "la mere des soupçons" and almanac "le mémoire de l'avenir" (Somaize lj, l, xlii). Through poetic style in everyday conversation, the *précieuse* transformed language into a complicated puzzle. By playfully twisting into knots her discourse, she

invented more elegant ways of avoiding the unpleasant realities beyond words. Pregnancy became a word too dreadful to utter. It was for her "le mal d'amour permis" (Somaize xlix). Her substitution of concrete, material phrases for abstract periphrases showed that words did not have a natural attachment to the idea they signified. Through the altering of signs, she created her own unique perception of life and unveiled the artifice of "universal" signs, such as superiority and grandeur, in ways that the *honnête homme* never dared to do.

The *honnête homme* gave strength to the king's established values when he dismissed innovations in language as an artificial way to gain prestige. Nicolas Faret warned his readers that the *honnête homme's* language had to be to the point and clear: "Or l'excellence des bons mots consiste principalement à estre courts, aigus, clairs, et proferez avec bonne grace..." (86). This idea of clarity was exactly what the *précieuse's* discourse challenged. Somaize goes so far as to state that the *précieuses* were not only embroidering everyday speech but creating a new one: "Leur langage est nouveau, et elles ont condamné toutes les phrases anciennes... il n'y a eu que le seul 'Vous m'entendez bien' et le 'Et cœtera' à qui elle n'ayent rien trouvé à dire" (119).

But contrary to what Somaize has claimed, the *précieuses* did not invent or use new words. The roots of *préciosité* go back to the sixteenth century, according to Julleville's *Histoire de la langue et de la littérature française*. It is an illusion to believe that the *précieuses* created such words and expressions as "air de la cour, bon air, furieusement, mine, ma chère" (771-2). One could easily find a corresponding list during the reign of Henri III. The poetry of the preceding century thus served as a foundation for the speech of the *précieuses*. In particular, the lyrical language of the poets of the Pléiade provided a direction for aspiring imitators. The Pléiade poets were very conscious that they were taking part in a revival of learning, as Grahame Castor suggests in *Pléiade Poetics*: "Only a poet in whom natural 'ardeur et allegresse d'esprit' was backed up by skill in 'art' and by solid learning could hope to produce a work which all posterity would treasure" (45).

Various examples illustrate that the *précieuse* appropriated the sublimities of sixteenth century poetry for her own use in everyday speech. Similar to the Pléiade poet, the *précieuse* spoke in metaphors and in exaggeration in order to capture the attention of

her listeners. Analogous to the poet, she also relied on mythology: a bed, for example, became "l'empire de Morphée"; she used many adverbs: "tendrement, terriblement, fortement"; and played with circumlocution: cheeks were designated as "les throsnes de la pudeur" (Somaize lj, lvi, l). Despite this resemblance, the *précieuse* was ridiculed largely in part for her willingness to expose the art contained in her work.

The Pléiade poets, in contrast to the *précieuses*, mastered the techniques of poetic creation so completely that their art seemed invisible. For example, in Ronsard's "Response aux injures et calomnies," he makes the point that the art of true poets was not an art at all to others, such as the versifiers:

Les Poètes gaillars ont artifice à part,  
Ils ont un art caché qui ne semble pas art  
Aux versificateurs, d'autant qu'il se promeine  
D'une libre contrainte où la Muse le meine.  
(809-12; 1063)

Genuine art for Ronsard, as for Du Bellay, was concealed art (Castor 48). The poet had not only to be endowed with a certain natural ability, but also a willingness to work hard. Artifice should never show itself. The Pléiade guided its poetic activity with this in mind, just as the *honnête homme* in the seventeenth century led his conduct according to this precept. True art for the poet and the *honnête homme* was a non-art to the uninitiated. In addition to this illusion of naturalness, Pléiade poets, such as Du Bellay, maintained that a work of art should not be a poor rendition of another artist's invention.

The comical representations of the *précieuse* focused on the fact that her speech was commonly seen as a poor imitation of an original source. Molière's pretentious young ladies are constantly dismembering original terms from poetic or dramatic texts (Lathuillère "Préciosité" 137). Magdelon injects a certain phrase out of context when she exclaims to the maid, "Vite, venez nous tendre ici dedans le conseiller des grâces" (sc. VI). This expression for a looking glass reveals Magdelon's desire to have the airs of Parisian sophistication. Fresh from the provinces, she is trying desperately to imitate the fashionable speech. Yet, her effort to create new signifiers is mocked because it appears not only out of context, but unnatural. Her discourse did not represent the "natu-



ral" world portrayed by the Pléiade poets or the *honnêtes gens*. Rather her speech expressed the artificial, yet free world of the salons.

The freedom desired by the *précieuse* pointed not only to a new type of female but to a new type of hierarchy based on self-creation. Michel de Pure emphasizes the idea of an independent *précieuse*: "La Pretieuse n'est point la fille de son pere ny de sa mere; elle n'a ny l'un ny l'autre" (63). The *précieuse* denied owing her status to her family. She considered herself a self-made cultural creation. Most importantly, the idea of a self-made creation effected changes in class ranking. The space of the *précieuses* became a place of social fusion for the old sword nobility, the newer robe nobility and the bourgeois on the basis of intellectual merit, rather than birth.<sup>8</sup> The social heterogeneity in the female sphere promoted the forging of new elites.

Louis XIV, ironically, also sought a similar forging at his court. While Louis exploited the insecurity of his nobility by providing them with a stage for the expression of their pomposity as *courtiers* at Versailles, he gave the important tasks of government to selected members of the bourgeoisie. However, there existed a large gap between the goals of the redistribution of power at the court and in the salon. The salon gatherings encouraged a democratization of the aristocracy in contrast to the court where the king worked towards an absolute monarchy.

In Louis' world, he was the master holding the key to the power of symbols. Under his rule, one naturally identified prestige and rank with sign, not referent. The *honnête homme* even promoted the king's absolutism by rationalizing arbitrary connections between honor and etiquette. As we have seen, Louis XIV composed skillfully his absolute image. Lurking in the background, the woman's war (the Fronde) had already exposed him to the precarious balance of power between a monarchy and its subjects. In the precious decade following this civil war, the *précieuse*, not the king, held momentarily the unique power of altering signs. The *précieuse's* creative and artificial endeavors for personal freedom were suppressed, however, when they challenged the closed universe of absolutism. By isolating and laughing at any threatening deviation, the reign of Louis crushed individual style in favor of the personal grandeur of the Sun King.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> On the object of satire as deviant or threat, see Alvin B. Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1965); Henri Bergson, *Le Rire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961); Leonard Feinberg, *The Satirist: His Temperament, Motivation and Influence* (Iowa: Iowa State UP, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> See Domna Stanton's article "The Fiction of *Préciosité* and the Fear of Women." She argues that the *précieuse's* satirical portrayal is retribution for her feminist assertions of power over sex and logos.

<sup>3</sup> Although some examples of the *précieuse's* discourse cited in this article are taken from male satirical writing, it is necessary to realize that a satire may distort but cannot create its own object. The authors who ridiculed *préciosité* had to imitate a recognizable manner: her speech. Other examples of the *précieuse's* language cited in this article come from an author who posed as a historian for these women: Antoine Baudeau de Somaize. There is considerable disagreement concerning the degree of satire contained in Somaize's work. I agree with Joan DeJean's perception of Somaize's text as historical instead of solely satirical: his *Dictionnaire* gives us a "brief history of the phenomena" (DeJean 60).

<sup>4</sup> The uprising of the Fronde, which fermented in the salons headed by women, originated in part with the rebels' desire to limit the influence of Anne of Austria's prime minister, Cardinal Mazarin. Ultimately, the Fronde's challenge to France's legitimate rulers failed. Louis XIV's reign changed course in 1661 because of the death of Mazarin (Beasley 43, DeJean 12).

<sup>5</sup> Only one official history was commissioned by Colbert: Priolo's *Histoire des dernières guerres* emphasized Mazarin's triumph over the rebels and ridiculed the rebellious nobles. See Orest Ranum, *Artisans of Glory: Writers and Historical Thought in Seventeenth Century France* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1980) 167.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the Princesse de Condé convinced the citizens of Bordeaux to defend the *frondeurs* against their king; Mme de Longueville organized the uprising in Normandy; The Grande Mademoiselle won the last victory for the *frondeurs* by giving the order for the Bastille cannon to fire on the royalist troops. See Dorothy Backer's chapter entitled "Queen of the Fronde" (141-50).

<sup>7</sup> During Louis XIV's reign, the nobility functioned on two levels, with the robe being socially inferior to the sword. The *noblesse d'épée* consisted of the old feudal aristocracy (based on birthright) while the *noblesse de robe* included individuals who had been ennobled for their

work, or who had bought their title for money (e.g., magistrates, financial experts, lawyers).

<sup>8</sup> See Carolyn Lougee's *Le Paradis des Femmes: Women, Salons and Social Stratification in 17th-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976). She traces the link between merit and rank in the salon.

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# The Question of Power in *Monsieur Toussaint* and *The Tragedy of King Christophe*

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Lisbeth Gant-Britton

There is a tempting model close at hand—the colonizer.... The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him.

Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*

Two of the most famous plays about Haiti's 1791 independence and the years following are *Monsieur Toussaint* by Edouard Glissant and *The Tragedy of King Christophe* by Aimé Césaire. Glissant, a leading cultural critic, novelist and playwright from Martinique, and Césaire, Martinican and founder of the *négritude*<sup>1</sup> movement, dramatize what Glissant describes as "missed opportunities" in postcolonial<sup>2</sup> societies (*Caribbean Discourse* 87). Written in 1961 and 1963, respectively, at the height of the Third World independence movements from Europe, these dramas serve as stark warnings to African and Caribbean leaders regarding the use and misuse of power. Haitian political scientist, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, explains that this phenomenon occurs when some postcolonial leaders are tempted to imitate the very self-serving colonials whom they ousted. He describes the procurement of wealth and privilege which rightly belongs to the people as the struggle of state against nation (163).

Through Glissant's and Césaire's fictional works, we witness the vitiation of the proud revolutionary ideals of Haiti into a stranglehold of tyrannical statehoods which ultimately victimize the very people they initially sought to liberate. For years, Haiti has attracted the attention of writers and historians throughout the Caribbean, since it was the first island in the region to wrest its independence from European control, as well as being the state with the most notorious reputation for autocratic and exploitative rule by its black leaders like "Papa Doc" Duvalier and successors such as his son, "Baby Doc." This fearsome trend was mitigated somewhat by the more populist-oriented leadership of past president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. However, Haiti's struggle to amelio-

rate its situation continues, and the island remains emblematic of the labors of oppressed peoples for self-determination. For that reason, *Monsieur Toussaint* and *The Tragedy of King Christophe* remain relevant today, even though they are primarily concerned with that country's eighteenth-century black leaders. Furthermore, the plays are still timely in light of numerous recent media accounts of the exploitation of various populations in postcolonial African and diasporic countries.

In exploring how the trope of power functions in the two plays, I will examine, within both textual and historical contexts, how these early Haitian leaders responded to their populace in terms of class, color and gender. I will also investigate how the people reacted to them. This interaction is dramatically portrayed by various sets of characters. Aside from the peasants, soldiers and workers depicted in the texts, there are selected individuals who form what we might liken to Greek choruses. In both plays, these choruses act alternatively in an obsequious and admonitory manner toward their two leaders. These groups serve as a barometer of the psychological changes which Toussaint and Christophe undergo as they rise in society. This rise illustrates Albert Memmi's observation in the epigraph that the primary danger of such a trajectory involves the risk of imitating the colonizer to the extent that the revolutionary leader becomes someone who is no longer akin to the people he initially led. The interrogation of postcolonial power occurs at precisely such an intersection of the leader/follower relationship in these works.

In *Monsieur Toussaint* and *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, this relationship revolves around the two actual historical figures, Toussaint L'Ouverture, who would eventually lead the 1791-1802 revolution against the French, and one of his most (in)famous successors, Henri Christophe, a revolutionary general who ultimately proclaimed himself "king" of Haiti and ruled briefly as such. Colonialism had a more beneficial psychological impact on François Dominique Toussaint and Henri Christophe than on other black slaves. Because of their skills, each rose to positions of relative prominence and privilege *vis-à-vis* the captive population on what was then known as the sugar-producing French colony of Saint Domingue.

Caribbean historian C.L.R. James describes Toussaint as being the son of a privileged slave and later one himself. His father had



been purchased by a liberal colonist who allowed the elder slave some discretion in his duties on the Breda plantation, as well as the use of five slaves to cultivate his own small plot of land. As a result, young Toussaint was able to study French, a little Latin and some geometry. He proved to be adept at the European education. This facility, coupled with his knowledge of herbs, brought him to the attention of the plantation owner who eventually made him steward of all the livestock on the estate, a responsible post which was usually held by a white man (19-20). As such, Toussaint held a coveted position and was part of a small privileged caste who repaid their favored treatment and somewhat easier life with a strong attachment to their masters. As James explains, "[p]ermeated with the vices of their masters and mistresses, these upper servants gave themselves airs" (19). Homi Bhabha characterizes such imitation as "colonial mimicry," being "almost the same but not white... the difference between being English and being Anglicized" (*Mimicry* 130).

James describes Henri Christophe as "a slave (who was) a waiter in a public hotel at Cap François, where he made use of his opportunities to gain a knowledge of men and of the world" (19). Neither Toussaint nor Christophe participated in the Haitian revolution at its onset in 1791. A field slave named Boukman led the first mass uprising, since at the time both men identified as much with the colonial elite as they did with the rebelling slaves. It would be several months before they individually joined their brothers from the fields. After that time, however, Toussaint rose quickly to prominence as his latent talent as a military and organizational tactician became apparent under duress. Calling upon the information he had gleaned about democracy and republicanism from his master's library, as well as his own natural analytical abilities, Toussaint was soon not only shaping a ragged band of determined rebels into a tightly-knit military command, but also designing a new socio-political and economic structure for the island.

However, as the post-revolution reorganization progressed, many black people in what would soon be the new Republic of Haiti thought Toussaint had gone too far in his protection of the French colonials during his reconstruction of the ravaged country. For instance, they criticized him for decreeing that the republic shoulder the expenses for restoring the plantation of Madame

Beauharnais, mother of Napoleon's first wife, Josephine. As Glissant explains in the afterword to his play, Toussaint had her plantation restored, even though it had been destroyed by the British during one of the revolutionary battles (101). Further, both Toussaint and later Christophe were condemned by the war-weary ex-slaves for forcing them, under penalty of severe punishment or death, to redevelop the land at a back-breaking pace. Christophe (who, after the death of Toussaint's successor, Dessalines, was appointed president and then became self-proclaimed king) would take this dictatorial passion even further after the institution of his monarchy. He actually conscripted the exhausted peasants as if they were in the army. He even forced small children to haul heavy stones to build a mountaintop fortress to protect the northern half of the island from invasion. He named his fortress "The Citadel," the ruins of which still stand today as an infamous reminder of his obsession to outdo his former European masters (Césaire 45).

As described by James, Toussaint's and Christophe's contact with Europeans had already shaped them into *quasi-assimilés* while they were still slaves. Their experiences within the margins of the colonial elite would later be the underlying cause for their failure to synchronize completely with the revolutionary ideals of Haiti's poor people. The resulting alienation would end in their ultimate downfall. In this way, they prefigure Frantz Fanon's "native intellectual" described in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon gives a scathing description of the type of "know-all, smart, wily intellectuals" and the ways in which they carry intact the manners and forms of thought picked up during their association with the colonialist bourgeoisie (48). On the one hand, the *quasi-assimilé* may possess knowledge about the functioning of the society and/or its administration which can be useful in overthrowing the colonial regime. But on the other hand, when the time comes to visualize and organize a new postcolonial society, *quasi-assimilés* tend to rely on the values of the colonial structure with which they have been imbued. Thus, while the intellectuals may help advance the "native cause" to some degree, they also ultimately risk undermining it.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon examines the psychological dilemma of the black colonial attempting subjectivity. Fanon, a psychologist himself, offers insights into the dilemma of the person who may have been exposed to European culture just enough

to become obsessed with proving his worth in terms of that environment. Fanon asserts that "black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect" (12). Seen in the Hegelian terms to which Fanon refers, Toussaint and Christophe represent two black leaders who reinscribe themselves in the "new" Haitian society, not as liberated "slaves," but as self-conscious "masters" as they assume the role of oppressors. Thus, instead of the transcendence which Hegel suggests should be the result of the master/slave dialectic, this distortion of power means that yet another form of master/slave domination has come to pass, this time black-on-black. This black-on-black domination is also a major theme in both of Glissant's and Césaire's plays. These works describe Toussaint and Christophe as charismatic leaders who, even though initially revolutionaries, later demonstrate the manners and forms which they carry intact from their colonial masters, and which the playwrights suggest are ultimately detrimental to Haiti, the Caribbean's very first postcolonial experiment.

H. Adlai Murdoch points out that, given the internal paradoxes intrinsic to principles of cultural hegemony, reworking strategies of colonial dependency into patterns of resistance poses precisely the most cogent challenge to the establishment of an ideologically integrated postcolonial situation (3). From the very beginning of *Monsieur Toussaint*, the black general himself is a symbol of this disjunction. The play indicates this dilemma by being staged with abstract sets that symbolize Toussaint's prison cell in the French Jura Mountains at the end of the revolution, as well as pre-revolutionary Haiti while it was still battling with the French and British to keep control of the island. When the play opens, Toussaint has already spent four years as leader of Saint Domingue's revolutionary forces (1791-1795), another six years as General, Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant Governor, and finally Governor for Life (in 1801) of the new nation of Haiti. Finally, alienated from his people, he has allowed himself to be lured away from there to his certain death by Napoleon's brother-in-law, General Leclerc. Glissant's interpretation of the ex-independence leader agrees with James in two ways: first, as a tragic hero who sacrifices himself when he realizes he can no longer meet the needs of his people; and second, as an overbearing plenipotentiary who eventually allows himself to be captured when he realizes that his

vision of an independent but Europeanized Haiti simply does not fit the actual mold of his country. Toussaint proclaims to the Chorus of the Dead, which represents the Haitian people: "Yes—I will go without trembling. For you I will leave the shores of life, see if I hesitate" (48).

The play unfolds in a "prophetic vision of the past" (17). Toussaint reviews his military and political career with the help of two choruses: The Dead, consisting primarily of early ex-slave rebel leaders, and The Living, made up of Toussaint's closest friends and enemies. In the first scene, the black general, still in his gilded uniform, is seated now, with his plumed hat, symbol of his authority, on his knees, leaving only a silk scarf on his head, reminiscent of a pirate.<sup>3</sup> The dichotomy of his appearance as pirate/general symbolizes the duality of his thinking. In spite of his role in the revolution, Toussaint has remained a devout monarchist because of his early Europeanized training. He now appeals to Napoleon for a pardon and for freedom. As his warder, Manuel, jeers about Toussaint not wanting to die before being received in Paris, Toussaint becomes a metaphor for the partially assimilated black person who has internalized contradictory notions of power. He is simply "Monsieur Toussaint" now, an ordinary citizen again, not "his excellency," the revolutionary governor-general who struck awe in the hearts of his people for nearly a decade.

Members of the Chorus of the Dead appear, led by ex-runaway slave "Maroon"<sup>4</sup> leader Mackandal and Mama Dio, the late Voodoo priestess. Mama Dio represents the authority of Voodoo and the heritage of Africa.<sup>5</sup> Mackandal exemplifies the early precursors of the present revolutionaries. Mackandal poetically reminds the ailing ex-general that if he could somehow have integrated his vision of a new society based on European practices and ideals with that of the African-inspired ideals of the black peasants, he might have avoided downfall: "François-Dominique Toussaint.... His black suit is the night to bring us together. His smile is the sun which proclaims: Arise!" More cautiously, Mama Dio adds, "Take care! Have you forgotten your people on the mountain, by the Bois Caiman, peering down through the night teeming with bonfires?" (25). Exchanges such as these with Toussaint's ancestors and dead comrades highlight the dichotomy between Toussaint the revolu-



tionary general and the Toussaint who maintained an allegiance to France.

The Chorus of the Dead also includes members of the younger generation of black slave revolutionaries who followed Toussaint. For instance, his ex-lieutenant Moyse represents the peasants-*cum*-soldiers who were frustrated by the fact that, as governor-general, he saw fit to return many of the plantations to their white owners who had remained in Haiti under his rule. The former slaves felt they had been denied ownership of the very land for which they had risked their lives. In fact, it was a difference of opinion over this very issue which led to Moyse's death. Toussaint had him executed for plotting with other revolutionary soldiers to curtail what they considered to be the leader's excesses. These drastic measures which Toussaint's closest lieutenants were forced to take against him, and the general's subsequent decision to rely on force rather than analyze how their relations had deteriorated to such a point are illustrative of Toussaint's failure as head of state to really listen to his nation. This failure is symbolized by his reluctance to consider his Chorus of the Dead in the play as well. The Chorus provides a "prophetic vision of the past" by reinscribing Toussaint metaphorically within the circle of his lost comrades such as Moyse, as well as other leaders such as Mackandal, whose historical message he should have understood and heeded when there was still time. This troubled relationship creates a tension between what was and what could have been. Now, after he has lost his power and is immured in his Jura cell, his dialogue with the "shadows" of these historical figures about his mistakes has an especially poignant ring.

The spectator understands the irony of the Chorus's warnings. We know that Toussaint is already in prison when Mama Dio cautions: "Do not take the Acacia Way... the sentry... dreams of a beast at gunpoint; that beast is you" (24). It is also clear that Toussaint has fallen from grace long before Mackandal foretells the latter's rise to power: "You were not yet born, but we felt your kindness at our shoulder, where the heavy hoe leaves its mark" (25). Likewise, the spectator comprehends that Toussaint has already been labeled "nothing but a traitor, for all your preaching" (27), by former rebel leader, Macaia, and many of the general's black followers. It was they who died for the promise of land and

freedom, but who had to watch their commander protect the plantations instead. Macaia spits out the following speech:

Before they even knew the word revolution, we were already running wild in the forest. We, the maroons. Dogs sniffed us a mile away, in the midst of a peaceful crowd. The runaway slaves smelled of freedom. We were building our republic! I, Macaia, chief of the Dokos, who have never bowed my head, fought for Toussaint when Toussaint fought for us! (37)

Being able to "eavesdrop" on Toussaint's history in the play enables the spectator to witness the former general's opacity, one which neither the Choruses of the Dead nor the Living have been able to penetrate. Throughout the play, we watch the black leader's struggle to grant authority to either the spirit world or to that of the living. As well, we see his attempt to succeed at two diametrically opposed goals: overturning colonialism politically, while at the same time imitating it economically and culturally. As Trouillot points out, the "politics of production" was at the heart of the struggle to reconstitute Haiti. Would a plantation economy dominate, thus reinscribing power in the colonial domain, or would free agriculture enable former slaves to enjoy successful subsistence farming, as well as some small market production (39)? The hostility which develops between Toussaint and his lieutenants in *Monsieur Toussaint* is a metaphor for this conflict. Dessalines, Toussaint's key subordinate, is an example of those revolutionaries who lose faith in the man they previously adored because he will not explain why he appears to favor their enemies: "You protect the colonials, but for them you are the butcher of the whites! You deal with the Consuls, while their leader is assembling a fleet in the ports of France to attack you! Don't be taken in by their fine words! ... Make your reckoning" (62). Toussaint replies, "It must be a sign of my weakness that you dare speak to me like that" (64).

It is clear that the general's goal is to be a part of the extended European world as a landowner and "scientific" (read European) man. A rift grows between him and the peasants and lieutenants who want to escape European and colonial influence altogether. Incensed, Christophe (still Toussaint's lieutenant at the time) declares:



Toussaint ordered me to continue the negotiations with Bonaparte's generals.... [W]hile he inflamed the war and led the battle, secretly he was arranging the conditions for peace.... None of us knew the purposes of the general.... If Toussaint had included us in his advice, we should perhaps have kept the land (76).

This, of course, is exactly what Toussaint is not prepared to do. The black general's power increasingly translates itself into ambivalence and self-deception. This conflict is highlighted by his dialogues with his wife who, in spite of the family's elevated position after the revolution, remains a humble and practical woman. Guided by observation of her husband's penchant for misplaced trust, Madame Toussaint warns him not to meet with General Brunet, a member of Leclerc's forces: "If Toussaint does not understand that they must arrest him quietly and deport him immediately... then it is because Toussaint does not want to understand" (79). The black leader's response reveals the ambivalence which Fanon describes as a "leadership complex" as well as a "dependency complex" (*Black Skin/White Masks* 99). On the one hand, Toussaint speaks as if he truly believes his power and authority as the former governor and as a new member of the planter class may function as a bulwark which Brunet would not dare breach. On the other hand, the black leader appears afraid of the consequences of *not* going to see Brunet, in that the French might construe a refusal to go as being part of a plot against them and increase their attacks against the island. Such ambivalence also illustrates Trouillot's observation that Haitian elites, even today, severely "limit" or censure their "local identity" and modulate it instead to fit their emotional and intellectual attachment to France (38).

Madame Toussaint also illustrates this tendency and demonstrates a degree of ambivalence in the play. Rather than being dressed in silks as a governor's wife, she appears in simple cotton clothes like Mama Dio and the Haitian peasantry to illustrate her identification with the poor people. But during the scene when Toussaint finally makes up his mind to join the revolution, we see her imploring her husband to think first of the family and their white master who has befriended them. She reminds Toussaint that thanks to the largesse of Mr. Libertat, they already have a "patch of land" and "can buy their [children's] freedom" (26). Her only reference to the black revolutionaries is a reminder that the

men are being killed and their wives left to carry on alone. Madame Toussaint's equivocation must be viewed not only as that of a wife fearful for her husband's safety, but also as that of a *quasi-assimilée* fearful of losing her scant privileges. Like her husband, she too is trapped in a border zone between the people and the power.

Even in her grief and frustration at Toussaint's final capture, Madame Toussaint continues to be an ambivalent figure. She reflects traces of both the peasants' and *quasi-assimilés*' battered hopes and dreams when she declares: "Spirit of the Dead, protect me, I am under your dominion." Mama Dio steps forth from the Chorus of the Dead and attempts to comfort her, but then acknowledges her own failure: "All that you hear is the strength that I am losing. They no longer expect my help. They are beyond dying, they have only to plow. You hear my night slipping away" (93). With this, the dead Voodoo priestess clearly represents the Haitian peasantry whose attempts at cohesion with the *assimilés* continue to be thwarted.

The scene between Madame Toussaint and Mama Dio also reflects the relationship of the poor in many postcolonial nations to their postcolonial leaders. The peasants find themselves struggling under the domination of leaders who replicate colonial oppression, even after the supposed liberation of the nation. As Benita Parry notes, it is not enough to respond to the oppositions embedded in colonialism *on their own terms*. "[This] does not liberate the 'other' from a colonized condition... the founding concepts of the problematic must be refused" (28). But completely refusing the colonial model is out of the question for either of the Toussaints or later Christophe, who consistently fail to recognize the degree to which their power is a Eurocentric construction.

By the time of the revolution, the tiny black slave "elite" has been too "permeated with the vices of their masters and mistresses," as James puts it. The favored slaves have already begun to disdain their counterparts in the fields. They have become preoccupied with imitating the Europeans, even receiving their cast-off silk and brocade clothing. Dressed in it, they dance minuets and quadrilles, as James describes, "bow[ing] and curtsy[ing] in the fashion of Versailles" (19).

This colonial mimicry is captured perfectly in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, Césaire's sarcastic depiction of Christophe, who briefly becomes Haiti's king. The play depicts his fetishistic adora-

tion of European civilization's ritualistic paraphernalia. In one early scene, Haiti's former revolutionary lieutenant and his followers are portrayed as clumsy students of a French "Master of Ceremonies." The ceremonial "master" has been sent to them instead of the engineer they had actually requested for the newly developing country. Christophe's sycophant assistant and secretary, Vastey, all but swoons in supposed delight at the master's instructions and the very idea of a black kingdom being a "perfect replica" of the "finest courts" the "Old World" (21) has to offer. He exclaims over titles like "His Lordship the Marquis of Downwind" and "Sir Lolo Prettyboy" (23).

As Césaire demonstrates, a distinct difference develops between Christophe's view of Haiti's economic and political success and that of his followers. The reader sees increasing skepticism on the part of many followers, as demonstrated by one of Christophe's most trusted older military officers, Magny. When Magny (who has had a dukedom pressed upon him) makes reference to their days of combat under Toussaint and Dessalines, Vastey shrugs him off, calling him a "man of little faith" (21). He proceeds to lecture the older man on behalf of Christophe, with the French Master of Ceremonies looking on approvingly. Vastey lectures him on the importance of form over substance insisting without a qualm on form's "stupendous, generative, life-giving *emptiness*," (ibid., emphasis mine). The irony of this nonsensical statement is not lost on Magny, however, who contends that the entire concept sounds like "pretentious rubbish" (ibid.).

As the scene unfolds, it becomes obvious that Vastey and the other would-be courtiers are parroting Christophe's views. Yet, when he leaves the room, they reveal their hypocrisy by deriding their ostensible lord and master. They make lewd remarks about how the king's power to bestow titles and favors earns him favorable entry into many of the noblewomen's beds. This scene illustrates how the greedy courtiers function as a servile and hypocritical chorus to Christophe and to his mimetic preoccupations.<sup>6</sup> Wrapped in their own self-interest, they are concerned only with pleasing Christophe as head of state rather than attending to the needs of the nation, so that he will continue to heap them with estates and riches.

This tension between the nation and the state is highlighted in one key scene which pits Christophe's growing despotism against

the peasants' determination. The ex-slaves and petty farmers finally decide to rebel against him. Christophe sends his soldiers to crush them without mercy. But Magny allows the rebel leader, Metellus, to speak before putting him to death.<sup>7</sup> The latter protests the harsh treatment the peasants are receiving under Christophe's absolute rule. He reminds the older soldier that they were originally going to build a country, "all of us together!" Metellus speaks passionately and at great length of the original idea to create a country "open to... black men everywhere. The blacks of the whole world." Then he criticizes the "politicoes" for "cutting the house in two." He repudiates Christophe, who by that time rules the entire northern half of the island in a self-serving manner. He also rejects Pétion, the mulatto who is president of southern Haiti, for privileging the lighter-skinned citizens over the black workers. Metellus scorns them both as "double tyranny" for the majority of the island's people (30).

Unfortunately, Magny is ever the military man. Unable to view any challenge other than in battle terms, he gives the order to have the rebel peasant shot on the spot. This scene demonstrates that despite Magny's continued scepticism about Christophe's methods, he still sides with the state against the nation. But by the end of this same scene, it becomes apparent that Magny begins to grow restive with Christophe, when the king unexpectedly decides to negotiate with Pétion, who up to now, has been considered an enemy. The self-appointed monarch does not even deign to explain to Magny, one of his closest noblemen, why he has changed his mind, but imperiously rejects the soldier's suggestions to march on Pétion and attempt a quick overthrow. Magny's skepticism turns into disillusionment as he dares openly to critique Christophe's apparently illogical behavior: "I only hope that your eyes aren't opened too late" (33).

Magny's warning (like Madame Christophe's which will come later) does nothing to stem Christophe's increasingly febrile attempts to solidify his power. His preoccupation with demonstrating that a black nation can also be grand begins to border on paranoia. Even though an emissary from France has arrived, Christophe insists that the country may be attacked at any moment. He insists that the black farmers (even their wives and small children) be conscripted into a worker's army to haul stones to build the massive citadel as well as huge castle he has decided will



be their means of protection and symbol of glory. When an aged peasant complains that "[y]our people are tired" (61), the king bursts into a fit of rage and orders that a nearby sleeping peasant, exhausted from overwork, be shot on the spot to make an example of him. Christophe even has his archbishop murdered in his bed when the latter begins "talk[ing] too much" (64). Afterwards, the king is convinced he has been visited by the archbishop's ghost and after a fit of shouting, collapses with a stroke.

Christophe becomes completely "empty" as a black man, a husband, a revolutionary leader and a monarch. As Bhabha notes, "paranoia never preserves its position of power, for the compulsive identification with a persecutory 'They' is always an evacuation and emptying of the 'I'" (*Sexual Subject* 142). Devoid of any self-reflexivity, Christophe, even as an invalid after the stroke, continues to be obsessed by his competition with European "civilization." As head of state, he relies less and less on communication, and more on coercion. Symbolically, this coercion takes the form of the construction of the Citadel and palaces, and politically it devolves into devious negotiations and repressive laws. All the while, Christophe maintains a veneer of cultural sophistication with gestures such as the creation of another group of sham elite called the Royal Gumdrops.

Madame Christophe is the only person close to him who perceives the folly of his actions and who is also in a position of enough authority to speak to him. The language she uses when she tries to warn him is laced with African metaphors. She cautions: "Take care, Christophe! If you try to put the roof of one hut on another it will be too little or too big! Christophe, don't ask too much of people or of yourself" (41). This linguistic choice reminds the spectator of Madame Christophe's ties with Haiti's poor, since many of the black people there continue to conceive of Africa as their homeland and dream of returning after their death. Thus, when her husband does not listen to her, he ignores the Haitian populace as well. Madame Christophe's references to Africa also echo the previous African references in *Monsieur Toussaint* made by Madame Toussaint and Mama Dio. Like these other women, Madame Christophe is not comfortable with the trappings of power if they mean exploiting the very people, still suffering, who helped put them in control. She speaks boldly and angrily to her royal husband:

In the middle of the savannah ravaged by a malignant sun, the great mombin tree with its dense round leaves under which the cattle thirsting for shade take refuge. But you? You? Sometimes I wonder if you, taking everything into your hands/trying to manage everything if you're not the big fig tree that grabs hold of all the vegetation around it and stifles it. (42)

Unfortunately, Christophe, like Toussaint, is unmoved by the insights of his Living Chorus (in the form of his wife, his closest retinue and the peasantry). Thus, the reader glimpses once again how a leader may go from being at one with his "nation," to becoming a "head of state," in which he turns against the very people he originally wanted to protect.

Christophe justifies his motivation for copying Europe by stating this mimesis is actually an earnest project to revise the past and recuperate "Mother Africa." He insists that since the Europeans "stole" the Haitians' "real" names and nobility, replacing them with "humiliating brand marks" like "Pierre and Toussaint," and since the Haitians cannot "rescue [their] names from the past," they will have to "take them from the future" (25). The major problem here is that Christophe accepts framing the "future" in eurocentric terms as being necessary, while at the same time he posits his subjectivity in Afrocentric terms. The end of this scene presages the conflict that such an unreconciled viewpoint will engender, as Césaire juxtaposes conflicting images of Africa and Europe. First, Christophe muses on his West African Bambara ancestors and their "power to speak, to make" (26). But as the lights come up, the Cathedral of Cap Haitien is illuminated, symbol of Catholicism's power in the region.

Christophe only indirectly acknowledges this conflict. Ostensibly, he views his efforts to create a black European-like kingdom, not as slavish aping of whites, but as political and cultural subversion, a black "power play," as he explains it to his French architect and engineer, Martial Besse: "This people, forced to its knees, needed a monument to make it stand up.... It's alive... Lighting up in the night. Canceling out the slave ship... plowing through the sea of shame" (45). Ironically, Christophe's intense desire for the power of a black state leaves no room for the immediate needs of his people to be assuaged, nor, in the longer term, for the poverty of the nation as a whole to be circumvented. In an earlier dialogue with Pétion, he describes a "state that ...will oblige our people, by



force if need be, to be born to itself, to surpass itself" (13). Fixed on his concept of glory, he cannot see his own constituency dying in front of him.

Convinced that "time is holding a knife to our throats" (40), Christophe, like Toussaint before him, discounts the investment in time necessary to insure that the people fully understand and agree with his reasoning. This lack of insight on the part of both leaders into the needs of those around them, as exemplified by the warnings of their choruses, leads to their own loss of power and eventual downfall. The Haitian legislative Assembly in the south considers Christophe's regime to be a "caricature." Eventually, his own top generals agree and defect. The soldiers/workers who bear the brunt of labor and danger in executing his construction orders, become increasingly rebellious and malcontent. They end up only working when threatened by Christophe's Royal Dahomey troops.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, even Christophe's closest retinue (his chorus) begins to question him about how he is undermining the nation in the name of establishing a new black state.

Referring to the historical Christophe and Toussaint, Trouillot states that the fundamental contradiction of the latter's early regime was his failure to recognize that an unconditional freedom of Haiti's black population was fundamentally incompatible with the maintenance of a plantation system (43). As a revolutionary leader, Toussaint undermined his own power by reimposing a repressive labor system on the very peasants who believed themselves to have been liberated from it. This crisis would be further exacerbated when Christophe, obsessed with making his northern kingdom flourish, would impose his own version of "militarized agriculture" (Trouillot's term) with an iron hand. Ironically, it would be Pétion, a mulatto, someone not historically viewed as being concerned about the well-being of the black Haitian peasantry, who would eventually initiate a land distribution program. Thus, in 1818 when Pétion died, it was he—not Toussaint or Christophe—who was nicknamed "Papa bon ke" by the peasants in recognition for what he had done (48).

It may be concluded from reading *Monsieur Toussaint* and *The Tragedy of King Christophe* that the question of power is one of the most important issues postcolonial nations face. The contemporary situation in Haiti is a dispiriting testament to this fact. As the situation now stands, in spite of poor Haitians' efforts (at great

risk) to elect a government which would attend to their needs, their favored Aristide was forced to give way to present president René Préval, who was elected with a bare twenty-eight percent of the votes. According to recent reports, many old problems continue to exacerbate his government's redevelopment process. For instance, American-assisted disarmament efforts largely failed. Paramilitary and ex-military forces remain heavily armed and battle daily with that country's antiquated and understaffed police force.<sup>9</sup> The gap between the rich and poor is as wide as ever. Unemployment continues at a staggering eighty percent, and many of those workers who do manage to secure jobs such as those in factories, are forced to work six days a week, ten hours a day, for twelve cents an hour.<sup>10</sup>

As Glissant and Césaire point out, in countries laboring to overcome the enormous economic, social, cultural and psychological problems induced by colonialism, power struggles among postcolonial elites can have the most direct, devastating effects on those least able to cope with them. Concerns about race, class, caste and gender in these two plays, as represented by the characters who form the various choruses, must be taken into consideration in ways that do not replicate asymmetrical colonial hierarchies. Thus, in cleansing themselves of the damaging residue of slavery and imperialism, postcolonial states will hopefully create new models which will no longer pit state against nation.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The *négritude* movement was started in the 1930s in Paris by a group of African and Caribbean students and writers. Principal among them were Aimé Césaire from Martinique, Léopold Senghor from Senegal and Claude McKay, one of the Harlem Renaissance poets from New York. The movement aimed at taking the most derogatory aspects of the black experience summed up in the French epithet "nègre" and turn them into a positive, self-affirming credo, which came to be known as "négritude."

<sup>2</sup> I am using the term "postcolonial" here, not in the sense of "post" as meaning "after," as if colonialism no longer exists. Rather, I wish to include an understanding that many of the same problems of hegemony still exist, but in altered forms, some of which are being executed by

people of color themselves. For a discussion of postcolonial discourse, see Madhava Prasad. "The 'Other' Worldliness of Postcolonial Discourse: A Critique," *Critical Quarterly* 34.3 (1992): 74.

<sup>3</sup> The Chorus of the Dead functions as more than just a theatrical stylistic device. It is common in Haiti and other African diasporic countries to believe in and converse with the spirits of the dead, even today.

<sup>4</sup> The name Maroon (in French "marron" and "marronnage") is an alteration of the Spanish name "cimarron" which originally meant "living on the mountain top." The term came from "cima" meaning "summit." In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the name Maroon was given to fugitive slaves in the Caribbean who escaped from the lowland plantations and made new lives for themselves in inaccessible peaks. In Haiti, one well-known community of Maroons were known as the Dokos. The Maroons became legendary symbols of the African fighting spirit and successful resistance to slavery.

<sup>5</sup> Voodoo (in French "Voudou") is often misunderstood to be a zombie-like trance in which people can be made to do things against their will. Although one aspect of the Voodoo practice does include allegedly powerful spells and incantations, for our purposes, we are interested in the transgressive and revolutionary aspects of this religious and cultural practice. During slavery, Voodoo gained tremendous authority as the secret rite in which African ancestors handed down their power and protection to rebelling slaves to allow them to overcome their slave masters without benefit of superior weaponry. The ancestors were known as "loas" or Voodoo gods, the most well-known of which was Ogun, originally a Nigerian god of war. The priests and priestesses who embodied these gods and administered the secret ceremonies were also treated with great deference and consideration.

<sup>6</sup> Although in Césaire's play, the stage directions do not call for this kind of "living chorus" to form as tightly-knit an ensemble as the one in *Monsieur Toussaint*, nevertheless, for the most part, they do function as a unit. As with Greek tragedies, it was customary to have a chorus on stage whose interaction with the hero provided the playwright with a means of commenting on the central character as a kind of subtext. Often, the chorus' agreement or admonitions reflected what the different members of the audience might be thinking themselves, thus providing a way for the subtle airing of diverse views within the dramatic context without unduly disrupting it. In this instance in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, by glimpsing the chorus' otherwise hidden insults, the spectator is able to surmise their true feelings about the man they ostensibly laud.

<sup>7</sup> Metellus's name is reminiscent of the character, Meletus, in Plato's *Euthyphro*, a dialogue about the unfair trial and death of Socrates. Meletus is the young man who first voices his concern about the corruption of the young Greek youth. For more on this, see Norman Melchert, *The Great*

*Conversation: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1995) 68.

<sup>8</sup> Christophe's Royal Dahomey Troops are ominous fictitious precursors of Haitian president François Duvalier's gestapo-like personal army, the Tontons Macoutes, who plundered and murdered upon his orders between 1957 and 1971, and who still operate to some extent today.

<sup>9</sup> Laurie Richardson. "Disarmament Derailed" *NACLA Report on the Americas* 29.6 (1996): 11-15.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Verhoogen. "The U.S.-Haiti Connection: Rich Companies, Poor Workers," *Multinational Monitor* 17.4 (1996): 7-11.

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## **LES FLEURS DE MALADIE: Baudelaire's Mother and "Writing Cure," 1860-1866**

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*Shelley Salamensky*

Sensualist, satanist, troubador of the life of the streets and the brothels, urban savage, salon wit, absolutist aesthete: Charles Baudelaire holds a special place in French popular culture. Films and plays depict a suave, womanizing rake: in the film *Les Fleurs du Mal*, "Baudelaire" flings noblewomen to the ground to have his way with them; in a one-man show, "Baudelaire" sips champagne, laughs with his head thrown back and caresses women in the audience. Condemned for obscenity in France, he has come over time to embody France, or a certain reading of France, the France of libertine life and art. Yet his letters to his mother reveal another Baudelaire. Among the letters, those written during the final stages of his illness are most provocative.

1860 marks Charles Baudelaire's thirty-ninth year and the first seizures he is to experience in the course of the syphilis which will cripple and kill him six years later. He is greatly unnerved by the incident, frequently indicated as a turning-point in his life; it also marks a turning-point in the letters to his mother. Caroline Aupick, a general's widow, lives in somewhat diminished circumstances in the family's former summer home at Honfleur. During his last years Baudelaire writes her more frequently than before—often daily, sometimes twice daily. In these later letters the cavalier voice of the poet gives way to that of a child: fragile, cranky and wracked by fear that his mother might not really love him.

As in his own time, Baudelaire is read not simply for Baudelaire-the-poet, but Baudelaire-the-man, or, often, more-than-man: the myth, the flesh-made-metaphor. Crucial to any study of Baudelaire's *œuvre* or biography is examination of the mother of the myth: less Caroline Aupick, the general's wife, than the mythical mother. In his later period, in fact, the two converge: the letters constitute by far the greatest part of his *œuvre*. The letters themselves, and particularly those from 1860-66, serve as a form of exploration of the figure of the mother. She appears, in these letters, to govern both the realms of illness and of narrative, and to dominate all structures of cure and narrative ending. The letters,

if not the poet, the man, and the myth, may be read through these configurations of the mother and "writing cure" by letter.

Charles's letters vacillate between effusive affection and accusation. Mme Aupick's letters are fairly unexceptional, featuring mainly remonstrances for Charles's underproductivity and overspending, inquiries after his health, local gossip, requests for Parisian goods, and pithy pieties; she is at once proud of her son's growing fame and scandalized by his work, most of which she refuses to read. In his letters, Charles rarely acknowledges his symptoms as those of syphilis. Often he locates their source in fasting forced upon him by financial straits, faulting his mother for what he considers his ascetic subsistence. At other points he takes the blame upon himself, and avows a program of more effective work habits as a form of voluntary self-discipline. It is difficult to determine Baudelaire's awareness of the cause or implications of these complaints, as in various letters he implores colleagues to direct him to a doctor who can ascertain what is wrong with him, and in others indicates that he is, in fact, fully cognizant of the nature of his malady.

Throughout the letters, Charles vows to rejoin his widowed mother in Honfleur; following the death of his despised stepfather and the separation from his long-term mistress Jeanne Duval, returning home has been, he writes, his only dream. He never succeeds in reaching Honfleur despite many opportunities, although he does pass through once on the train. Near the end of his life, his mother offers several times to travel to him, but is always rebuffed. Finally, bedridden in Belgium, one side paralysed, Charles continues to correct proofs, conduct business and announce travel plans. His final letter is written in March 1866. He dies seventeen months thereafter, aphasic and paralyzed, Mme Aupick by his side.

In the course of the letters after 1860 a gradual shift may be seen to occur, from Charles's self-described hypochondria to what might be called "hyperchondria"; physical complaints decrease in frequency and are limited to documented syphilitic symptoms.<sup>1</sup> Even late into his illness, he conceals from Mme. Aupick, friends and seemingly himself the actual extent of his difficulties:

As for the palpitations and stomach pains, they're gone....  
Moreover, there's nothing original in my condition. Several

French people have been attacked by this diarrhea, which I attribute to the climate and the drinking of faro [a cheap beer]. (31 July, 1864; 2: 392)

In a general manner, I'm in excellent health, seeing as I never had an illness at all. That I suffer a few disabilities, rheumatisms, neuralgias, etc., what does it matter? It's the common lot. (22 August, 1864; 2: 397)<sup>2</sup>

In these letters, it is as though the body, converted into the word in the poetry, may in turn be altered through the word.

The letters, like his poetry, tend to transform illness and the body into metaphor; in one, Charles writes, "If ever a man was ill, without its having anything to do with medicine, that man am I" (25 December, 1857; 1: 437). However, the later letters also increasingly emphasize illness and the body *as such*, Charles's illness, Charles's body. As the situation becomes desperate, the once obsessively private poet even writes of his illness to colleagues. Illness may be seen, in Elaine Scarry's terms, to enact Charles's body's "making," its conceptual coming-into-being, as well as its "un-making," both as death and as destruction of the metaphorical body. The figure of the mother—the metaphorized mother—is tied to this process, in the logic of the letters, as origin and end.

As Charles's illness unmakes his body, his body demetaphorizes, materializes, and reveals itself to companions, to his public, to his mother—and mostly to the reader equipped or encumbered with historical hindsight. The tragedy of the letters composes itself less within the text than in the consciousness of the retrospective reader, in his or her awareness that Charles is dying of syphilis while Mme Aupick is dying of old age. The letters form an alternate *œuvre*, another *histoire*, concurrent with and finally overtaking his official *œuvre*. Perhaps some of the pathos of this story, for the reader—the party best positioned to assemble the text as story—derives from the movement from weakness, illness, death and the body as public metaphor to the private fact of corporeality as "the bottom line," the place where all metaphors stop.

Susan Sontag's exploration of the rewriting of AIDS through metaphor suggests notions and uses of syphilis in the case of Baudelaire. Syphilis, as evident effect of a pre-troped cause, lends itself especially well to metaphorical conceptualization; long concealed within the body, the "social disease" is eventually a reveal-

ing condition, the indisputable record of its cause. The simple physicality of syphilis is at once masked by, and exposes, its attendant discourse. Sontag calls for a new socio-medical discourse—one which would resist interpretation—yet fails to note one issue central in this case: the rewriting of metaphor through illness via the body's own veto of metaphor. Baudelaire's letters position illness-as-metaphor and illness-as-such in dialectic. In one wrenching instance, not long before his paralysis, Charles, in *Mon cœur mis à nu*, presents his malady as simple lazy decadence; lapsed virtue is no longer cited simply as the cause of physical disease, but as the disease pinning the physical body to the bed. For the modern reader, the popular mythicization of Baudelaire's body comes into play as well; the cultural constituent, in becoming a reader of the letters, must herself engage in the intimate process of deciphering Baudelaire's metaphorical body into a physical body.

Issues of the metaphorical body, in this correspondence, are often doubled as issues of the letter—the representative body, the stand-in for presence. The erotics of the epistolary are, of course, well-noted.<sup>3</sup> The letter may also be seen to reflect various bodily functions—here, as a means of transmission:

If I write you today, it is only to tell you, to repeat how uneasy I am over the effect my letter is going to have upon you. The more I think about it, the more afraid I am that I have pained you....  
(4 August, 1860; 2: 70-71)

In this letter, the act of communicating information parallels the act of communicating disease. Charles anticipates the effect, phrased in physiological terms, that his previous letter will produce upon his mother; his concern is largely with the consequence of the letter's arrival, the letter's material aspect as ersatz presence of the writer. In this case, the writer makes a second appearance before the first is complete; he writes "only...to repeat," to replicate the doubts of the previous letter, though at the moment of this letter's writing, it is unclear whether the previous letter has yet had its effect, or any effect. In some respect this insistence upon the letter's effect might be read as resounding with hope for success in the effort to affect or infect (as in Charles's self-described "affection verolique," [6 May 1861, 2: 152]); this tone echoes through the following letter: "And when you don't write me, I imagine you're

unhappy, out of sorts, ill, etc." (8 October, 1860; 2: 95). When Mme Aupick fails to reply to a letter, infirmity is anxiously, perhaps ambitiously, inferred. Charles beseeches her to write, to share her illness, to re-communicate it to him as cure, where "cure" enacts, on the level of the signifier, a healing of the Oedipal split. The diseased penis sheathed from discussion, illness is communicated, nonetheless, by the diseased pen. In reviewing his life, Charles returns repeatedly, if not obsessively, to the mother:

To tell you the truth, I need to be saved, and it is you alone who can save me. (6 May, 1861; 2: 152)

Can you believe what a great memory I have? Long walks, constant acts of tenderness.... Oh, for me, that was the good age of maternal tenderness.... I lived constantly through you; you were mine alone. (6 May, 1861; 2: 153)

I'm deathly bored; my great distraction is thinking of you. My thought is always turning toward you. I see you in your bedroom or parlor working, walking, moving about, complaining and reproaching me from afar. And then I see anew my childhood by your side. (23 December, 1865; 2: 553-54)

Similarly, discussion of illness in the letters often displays a logic of return to the mother: "For many months I have been ill, of an incurable malady, of weakness and enfeeblement.... To add to my sadness and disgust, I have made you sick" (21 August, 1860; 2: 84). Illness, shared with Mme Aupick by letter, effects an almost bodily bond, reminiscent of an earlier one.

Return to infancy, of course, as inverse of death, may in some way be positioned as its antidote; in addition, fears of death as the loss of individual consciousness and/or the ultimate individualization—in a later version of Jacques Lacan's "mirror stage" scenario—may be benignly recast as the similar ambiguities of the mother-child union. Significantly, in the later letters, General Aupick and Jeanne Duval, the posited causes of the mother-son estrangement, remain almost completely unmentioned. Elision of these dual infidelities to the Oedipal promise, as well as Charles's post-childhood—sexual—state, may be seen to strengthen the circular structure, conceivably enhancing the aura of return in the letters. This discourse, from which Charles's stepfather and lover



have been expunged, recalls the childhood state predating the mother's disapproval and Charles's fatal—sexual—error.

Return to originary innocence and to the mother's approval also figure in Charles's pursuit of cure. Illness, in its particularity as syphilis, appears in the letters as adulteration, inscription, artifice, incompleteness, versus a cure imaged as purification, erasure, essence, end. The taint, Charles insists in one letter, may be washed away through three months of scrubbing baths to purify a man, as well as purgatives, poisons, fasting, and "rye bread at all my meals", a curious Host (8 May, 1861; 2: 161).<sup>4</sup> To Charles's physical self-punishment is added moral self-castigation, echoing Mme Aupick's characteristic criticisms of him—though it is Charles himself who connects her critique to illness by taking it up as a cure:

I know that I am completely cured, and that I am a miserable creature made of laziness and violence, and that habit alone can serve as a counterweight to all the vices of my temperament....  
(3 June, 1863; 2: 300)

Resolution in the sense of planning may often be seen to stand in for resolution in the sense of ending or cure; declaration of intention often functions, in the dynamic J.L. Austin that traces, as a form of contract whereby future action is to be bartered for present approbation (158). In this case, the speech-act's ersatz fulfillment of the promise by promising is further enhanced by the substantiality of the letter-act. Moral reform, signed, sealed and mailed, appears here, on some level, as a *fait pré-accompli* to be rewarded.

Moral, and not bodily, cure is, it would seem, the ultimate object; if bodily cure is an object, it is by way of moral cure and thus cure of the Oedipal split. Neither is Charles's body, apparently, his illness' final goal: "You have passed a bad night, thanks to me. Thus I was very wrong in telling you of my infirmity..." (10 February, 1866; 2: 593). Neither is Charles's own imminent end the endpoint of his teleology. The story is incomplete without the death of the mother. The narrative's ultimate destination, both in the sense of addressee and end, is also the origin: the mother.

Yet under the terrible circumstances in which I've been placed, I am convinced that one of us will kill the other, and that finally we will kill each other reciprocally. After my death, you will no

longer live—that's clear. I am the only object which makes you live. Especially if you died on account of a shock caused by me, I would kill myself—that's undoubtable. (6 May, 1861; 2: 150-51)

Mme Aupick appears, in the logic of the letters, as both cure for and conclusion of her son's illness, and her death as both conclusion of and cure for her son's story; D.A. Miller's observations on novelistic strategies of closure in response to narrative disorder are no less valid here.

Where illness and narrative share the quality of undecidability, cure may be seen to serve as conclusion, and vice-versa. Cure through death and narrative ending, indeed, seems the only solution at points when all living options are presented as untenable:

You're told I'm doing well? Not one of my infirmities has left me... nor fear above all, the fear of dying suddenly; the fear of living too long, the fear of seeing you die, the fear of falling asleep, and the horror of waking up.... (13 December, 1862; 2: 273-74)

Cure, death and narrative closure may be situated at once as ending and as arrival at the plot's teleological object. If arrival, achieved through the death of the mother and the conclusion of the narrative, were, in fact, the letters' simple hope, Charles's story might be said, in some sad way, to have a happy ending. Yet, paradoxically, the notion of arrival at all proves, itself, quite problematic. From 1860 to 1866, letter after letter declares Charles's longing to see his mother at Honfleur, a few hours' journey from Paris: "What longing I have to be in my room! ... But sometimes I become so sad, I fancy I'll never see Honfleur again" (8 August, 1864; 2: 394). "I will make only this cruel reflection, that I was crazy not to have spent these last years close to you. I deprived myself criminally of these last years" (30 May, 1865; 2: 504). Plans for the trip are repeatedly made; the letters arrive, but Charles never does, despite travel through Honfleur and to Belgium. "I'm going to come. I've already taken the necessary steps, by which I mean to say I've made it impossible for me not to leave by the end of the month" (10 August, 1862; 2: 253). "[My] goal [is] to settle down at Honfleur by the end of June..." (30 May, 1865; 2: 504). He cannot die before returning to Honfleur, he writes frequently, for either sentimental or practical reasons: "There is one thing which should

reassure you. I can't kill myself without having put my affairs in order. All my papers are at Honfleur in a great confusion" (6 May, 1861; 2: 151). Logically, then, if Charles does not return to Honfleur, he will not die. Mme Aupick's offers through the years to travel to Paris, and later to Belgium, are declined.

My good dear mother, I did the greatest wrong in speaking to you of my Belgian health, since that so adversely affected you. Has anyone ever seen a mother of your age willing to set out on the road simply because her son has a stomach ruined from a bad climate! (22 August, 1864; 2: 397)

Home and mother are incessantly figured as answers to the indecidabilities of illness and life, yet all choices which might render them actualities are rejected.

Charles's attachment to France itself displays a similar conflict; having exiled himself to Belgium, a land he originally idealized as refuge from a despised France—"I'm going to flee the human face, but above all the French face" (10 August, 1862; 2: 254)—as promising a final career triumph, Charles writes:

They say (and I believe it today) that the other nations are even stupider than the French. Then it is necessary to return to live in France, despite the idiocy of that land, or go to the other world. (21 February, 1866; 2: 620)

The letters' construction of France as final destination might be read as significant less in France's being-as-France than as not-Belgium, its being-as-where-Charles-is-not. However, he fails to move back to France of his own volition. This continual movement of displacement/denial/deferral reflects that in relation to home and, particularly, the mother, whom Charles essentially tells, "Don't come," a paradigm which might be viewed in relation to Baudelaire's rumored and confessed fear or repugnance toward sexual completion.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of narrative, it may be seen that consummation of desire, as arrival at destination, must collapse the correspondence. As Peter Brooks notes, "Stories are told for purposes, to establish a claim on the listener's attention, an appeal to hearing, which is also an appeal to complicity..." (61). Correspondence, as narrative genre, necessarily constructs an imaged, perhaps idealized, audience out of the letter's recipient. When the mother of the letters

expresses disagreement, the hope of the real mother remains. Charles complains to his mother that she does not read his letters carefully enough, and that hers contain "numerous errors and false ideas that a conversation could set right"; however, the correspondence continues, and the conversation is not to be had. The threat of the correspondence between Charles and his mother failing is that Charles and his mother might fail to correspond. Perhaps, also, it is only within the parameters of the letter that Charles may linger between life and death, evading the consequences of either. As Maurice Blanchot observes of suicide: "Having death within reach, docile and reliable, makes life possible, for it is exactly what provides air, space, free and joyful movement: it is possibility" (97). Within the space of possibility afforded by any narrative whose ending must be death, multiple, contradictory desires may arise, be teased or fulfilled and still retain the driving power of *sed non satiata*. Cure, ending, arrival are ardently sought, and avoided, in play against a later certainty.

In the letters from 1860 on, Charles generally gives work as the reason that he cannot travel to Honfleur or return to Paris; however, discussion of work itself seems to resonate with the logic of inconclusion. As his illness progresses, Charles produces less and less. Yet, as late as 1865, he continues to grasp at the notion of work, like the notion of the mother, as salvation: "The important thing is to take on the habit of work, and to make of this disagreeable companion my one pleasure" (23 December, 1865; 2: 554). By March of 1866, he has lost the use of one side of his body. Mme Aupick's offers to come to Belgium are matched by friends' offers to finance his trip back. All are refused on the basis of work. Yet, at this point, he cannot work; he literally cannot write. "The doctor who has the kindness to write under my direction implores you *not to get excited* and tells me that in a few days I'll be ready to take my work back up again" (23 March, 1866; 2: 629). The letter above may be seen to attempt to function as healthy proxy; if Mme Aupick believes the letter representing Charles as on the mend, within the world constructed by the letter, he will be. Writing, in the letters, and of the letters, has long stood in for cure, as if, through writing about or around sickness and death, through the manipulation of language, the material might be marshalled under control. Writing's wordiness may be seen in opposition to death's silence, particularly in the case of the letter, which doubles writing's materiality

in against the threat of divestment of representation. Before slipping into a more disabling paralysis and the aphasia which will prevent even dictation, Charles dictates one final letter. It is to his mother.

The response relayed Monday arrived to you Tuesday night. Wednesday, Thursday and today Friday, you should have been able to send me your news; if you haven't done it, it's that you suppose that I don't worry but about myself. ... It is absolutely necessary that you send me your news. ... I received one letter from [family advisor Ancelle] which tells me he's coming soon. This is pointless, at least premature. ...

1st Because I'm in no state to budge;

2nd Because I have debts;

3rd Because I have six towns to visit... I don't want to lose the fruit of a long labor....

I am, moreover, prepared to return as quickly as possible. Write me at length and in minute detail about yourself. I embrace you with all my heart. (30 March, 1866;2: 632)

Writing cannot, finally, cure him of the body; the body now cures him of writing. However, the narrative does not, in fact, end there. Charles survives for another seventeen months, during which Mme Aupick arrives. He lives unable to narrate, unnarrated but for the words of his mother, who writes to his friends and colleagues in his place. At times she professes the wish to nurse him to the end; at others she complains of his bizarre behavior and postpones his removal to Honfleur, ashamed on account of the neighbors (Richardson 464). Charles does finally die in his mother's arms, after which she writes of her dream of their other-worldly reunion (10 June, 1868; Richardson 497). Their story might be told by way of many different narratives, some more useful than others.<sup>6</sup> However, in the letter Baudelaire might have penned, return to the mother, unattainable in life, arrives with death—but more so—is achieved through narrative, where the poet, the man, the myth—and his mother—meet.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dandyistic tendencies are also presented as medically motivated; the bohemian life of the Quartier Latin was, for instance, deemed unsalutary, in contrast to the elegant Ile St.-Louis (Starkie 56). Also see Sartre on Baudelaire's "fear" of nature and cult of sterility.

<sup>2</sup> All translations my own.

<sup>3</sup> See Kaufman.

<sup>4</sup> See Sontag on the "fight" against disease.

<sup>5</sup> See Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Baudelaire*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

<sup>6</sup> See Jacques Lacan on certitude and the Imaginary construct. *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, Trans. and ed. Anthony Wilden, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991) 11.

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# FRACTALISATIONS de l'Écriture dans *le Nouveau Monde Amoureux* de Charles Fourier

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*Nadine Bordessoule*

Notre propos est d'observer une butée. Pour ce faire, nous commencerons par prendre la mesure d'un but. De l'œuvre de Fourier, nous tenterons de dégager la visée: non pas tant pour analyser l'organisation du monde qu'il espérait instaurer que pour cerner le type d'effet qu'il cherchait à obtenir par la rédaction et la publication de ses écrits. Charles Fourier fut l'auteur au début du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle d'une œuvre généralement qualifiée d'utopique où se mêle à la critique de la société des propositions inédites de réformes agraires, économiques, politiques et sociales. Notre objet sera donc d'abord un projet: par-delà l'œuvre réalisée, nous essaierons de reconstituer l'œuvre rêvée et l'impact qu'elle aurait dû avoir sur le destin du monde. Ce sera l'occasion d'explorer un avatar précoce de ce fantasme du Livre Absolu qui hantera toute la fin du siècle—châtré cependant du contenu social et historique qui l'anime encore chez notre auteur.

De cet élan, littéraire et philanthropique, il nous faudra cependant constater la butée. A chaque pas de son écriture, Fourier vient donner sur des écueils qui bloquent sa démonstration, déchirent son texte et font sombrer sa parole dans les ténèbres du délire. Nous nous demanderons alors pourquoi et comment de ce projet grandiose il n'a pu mettre à flot que des épaves dérivant depuis bientôt deux siècles, étonnantes et émouvantes, mais ridicules en comparaison des horizons nouveaux qu'elles auraient dû ouvrir au monde.

En suivant Fourier dans les impasses où il va s'enfermer, nous constaterons que c'est pour s'être buté dans un refus obstiné de l'éloquence et du travail littéraire qu'il a condamné les lambeaux de son Livre à rester enfermés dans la poussière de nos bibliothèques. Car le fait pour nous est acquis: contre ceux qui veulent voir en lui l'audacieux précurseur du marxisme ou l'authentique inventeur de la psychanalyse, nous soutenons que Fourier est un parfait idiot, au sens où ses intuitions lui sont restées absolument singulières, désespérément impuissantes à se dégager

un espace public. Nous nous intéressons avant tout à la comparaison de Fourier avec lui-même, à l'abîme qui sépare son projet rêvé de son œuvre réalisée.

Notre approche ne prendra donc pas pour cible le contenu du système fouriériste, mais bien ses tentatives et ses problèmes d'expression. Même si l'étude mériterait d'en être faite, nous ne chercherons pas à déterminer la logique littéraire qui structure l'époustouflant foisonnement de figures, de motifs et de thèmes dont pullule le texte fouriériste. Plutôt que d'entrer dans le dédale (sans doute fascinant) de son délire poétique, nous nous centrerons sur la logique du balbutiement qui gouverne son énonciation.

Pour ce faire, il nous fallait trouver, parmi l'œuvre de Fourier, un texte qui porte les stigmates de ces difficultés. Notre choix s'est porté sur le *Nouveau Monde Amoureux*. Le *Nouveau Monde Amoureux* est le dernier manuscrit de Charles Fourier. Longtemps ignoré, il ne fut publié qu'en 1967, soit 120 ans après la mort de son auteur. Sous-titré *Synthèse finale*, il suggère que les derniers développements de la théorie fouriériste y sont contenus. En tant qu'ultime témoignage, inachevé dans son détail, n'ayant jamais été préparé pour l'impression, dispersé en de nombreux cahiers, son intérêt pour nous réside surtout dans son illisibilité.<sup>1</sup>

C'est son caractère de texte en chantier qui fait du *Nouveau Monde Amoureux* un objet privilégié pour notre approche: c'est là en effet, dans les ébauches avortées, dans les blancs ouvrant l'espace vide d'un mot toujours manquant, que se livre à vif, à l'œuvre, la distorsion qui dévoie l'écriture de Fourier, qui détourne la portée de son travail et qui en fracture l'Utopie.

D'une première lecture du *Nouveau Monde Amoureux*, on ne peut tirer que déception. A la place du projet révolutionnaire dont on attendait en 1830 de nouveaux horizons philosophiques et d'inédites propositions sociales, on s'engluie dans un fatras décousu où se mêlent les litanies les plus délirantes et les élucubrations les plus aberrantes. Cette masse parfaitement hétéroclite et incohérente se plaît toutefois à se parer du vernis de la science. Pourcentages, fractions et multiples omniprésents tentent en effet de donner une apparence de structure au projet: toute démonstration chez Fourier est affectée de ce syndrome du calcul, de sorte que la moindre idée se chiffre finalement par une estimation d'épicier. Si le *Nouveau Monde Amoureux*, prometteur par son titre d'indiscrétions sur le secret des alcôves "harmonieuses" ou de scènes alléchantes

d'érotisme, laisse tout d'abord le lecteur sur sa faim, il en arrive bientôt à exciter son appétit herméneutique: pourquoi tant de chiffres ? De quoi sont-ils symptôme ? Qu'y a-t-il, à travers eux, à déchiffrer ?

### *Des chiffres aux mots*

Le système entier de Fourier semble être structuré par le modèle de l'intervalle mathématique, soit de l'espace qui sur la droite des réels sépare deux nombres, espace segmentable à l'infini. Ce qui frappe en effet dès le premier abord à la lecture de Fourier, c'est cette possibilité infinie du système de raffiner ses catégories. Entre deux spécifications sur "la vie en Harmonie," il semble y avoir toujours de la place pour une troisième. La réflexion de Fourier procède ainsi par raffinements successifs à l'intérieur d'un espace borné aux extrêmes par deux pôles d'une catégorie.

L'homme, quant au matériel, est borné à deux individus, l'un mâle, et l'autre femelle.... L'homme se réduit donc à deux corps, mâle et femelle, et un tel couple pris au hasard est le type complet de l'homme matériel.... Il n'en est pas ainsi de l'homme passionnel qui est un composé de 810 âmes ou caractères assortis en contrastes gradués en proportion de 21 mâles pour 20 femelles. (NMA 458)

Tant qu'elle ne s'arrête pas à une représentation détaillée, la pensée peut englober sans peine l'espace conceptuel intermédiaire. De sorte que le système imaginé par Fourier ressemble à un arbre de la connaissance aux branches innombrables: les ramifications de la théorie se scindant toujours en rameaux multiples, en une tentative infinie de recouvrement absolu. Les difficultés auxquelles l'utopiste se heurtera ne sont dès lors pas à situer au stade de l'invention de ces catégories et de leurs inépuisables spécifications, mais plutôt au niveau de la représentation qu'il tente d'en faire au moyen d'une écriture qui n'est pas douée d'une telle faculté de se ramifier à l'infini. Face à l'éventail des possibilités imaginées, la linéarité du signifiant demeure en effet impuissante à restituer d'un seul trait le déploiement des idées. Les descriptions sautillent continuellement de la ramification d'une branche à la ramification d'une autre, sans jamais pouvoir en remplir les catégories intercalaires. L'écriture s'épuise à combler de détails les espaces dont un premier jet n'a donné que les bornes. De sorte que le texte,



mémoire de cette désespérante et illusoire tentative des mots à formuler la pensée, bringuebale et s'abîme finalement dans le vide de signifiant et dans le détail de proposition disjonctive et de la gigantesque combinatoire à laquelle leur enchaînement donne lieu. Chaque nouveau pas dans la théorie ne fait que dégager des espaces condamnés à rester vides, inexplorés, inutilisés: en souffrance.

Plutôt que de nous faire découvrir la plénitude de la terre d'Utopie, la parole de Fourier nous désigne inlassablement de nouveaux domaines, séduisants mais en friche, qu'il est contraint d'abandonner à leur stérilité, pressé d'aller voir plus loin d'autres champs dont la culture serait tout aussi nécessaire mais que cette course sans fin condamne au même abandon.

### *Le raffinement et l'aphasie*

En radicale opposition avec la Civilisation (état actuel du monde) Fourier envisage sous le terme d'"Harmonie" l'état du monde régi par le système utopique, et il le présente comme un univers d'hyper-raffinement. L'instauration d'une nouvelle gestion des biens, les réformes sociales et agraires, dont le philosophe donne le détail dans ses autres ouvrages, devraient entraîner, dans un premier temps, une abondance permettant d'assurer le confort de chaque harmonien. Mais cette abondance ne tardera pas à être dépassée par une surabondance dont Fourier a déjà prévu la gestion. Il propose d'absorber l'excès ainsi généré non par le gaspillage comme cela est coutumier aux civilisés, mais par le raffinement des habitudes, tant dans le domaine alimentaire qu'amoureux: la "gastrosophie" se définit ainsi comme science et sagesse de la gastronomie tandis que les amours "omnygines" offrent des possibilités renouvelées d'unions charnelles, composant ainsi des gammes harmonieuses sur le grand "clavier passionnel" du monde. Le raffinement est donc en quelque sorte constitutif du monde harmonien tel que Fourier le conçoit. Dès lors, les infinies catégories du système peuvent apparaître, non plus comme un cancer de l'imagination fouriériste, mais comme le corollaire logique du nouvel état du monde "harmonisé."

La frénésie taxonomiste de l'utopiste semble cependant se heurter à une résistance émanant du stock limité de signifiants dont il dispose pour manifester sa pensée. Le raffinement incessant du système engendre en effet une quantité d'objets et de

catégories encore inédits qu'il faut bien nommer. Se pose alors le problème de la terminologie. Bien que Fourier allègue sans cesse des prétextes pour ne pas nommer les détails qu'il évoque constamment au cours de ses développements, il n'en reste pas moins qu'il lui faut à tout instant inventer des noms pour désigner ses créations. Ainsi se succèdent au fil des pages une ribambelle de "fées," de "céladons," de "pille-talons," de "dygines," de "trigynes," et de "multigynes," de "visuistes," de "savetiers," d'"orgies harmoniques" ou de "passions composites, cabalistes ou papellones..." Ce bonheur de la lexicalisation se retrouve d'ailleurs au niveau même du métalangage par lequel Fourier désigne les éléments de son texte segmenté outre une préface et une postface en antiface, citerface et ulterface aux multiples sections.

Mais ces tentatives d'innovations lexicales ne parviendront pas à endiguer la surabondance des concepts nouveaux. De sorte que Fourier se heurte sans cesse aux lacunes du signifiant. Ce qui donne par exemple: L'amour "est la passion la plus proscrite par les coutumes civilisées; on ne lui laisse qu'un \*\*\*\*\* appelé mariage dont les \*\*\*\*\*" (*Nouveau Monde* 3). On y lit le résultat d'une écriture hâtive qui vise à communiquer l'essentiel et se soucie peu de s'attarder sur ses défauts.

### *Les mots lui manquent*

Le sentiment de claudication que l'on éprouve tout au long de la lecture de l'œuvre de Fourier est un des principaux effets de l'impuissance de l'auteur à gérer sa pensée. L'anacoluthie se fait principe d'écriture dans ce projet fou qui tente de charger les mots du poids de la totalité du rêve. Des abîmes de possibilités nouvelles se dévoilent à chaque rupture entre "la minutie domestique de l'exemple et l'ampleur du projet utopiste" (Barthes 98). Son procédé d'esquisse, qui empêche l'auteur d'approfondir les domaines qu'il entrevoit, évacue du même coup la nécessité de les circonscrire d'un nom. Dans d'autres circonstances il ne prend même pas la peine de vérifier que le signifiant du concept qu'il manie existe déjà. Que Fourier invente la catégorie ou que celle-ci existe déjà mais que le nom lui échappe, le fil de l'écriture tend à se faire dentelle autour des trous du signifiant.

Ce processus ne relèverait que de l'anecdote, s'il n'était mis en écho par un exemplaire unique dans l'œuvre de Fourier d'un jeu avec le signifiant. Il s'agit d'une lettre adressée à sa cousine Laure.

Le contenu en est banal, mais le mode de rédaction repose sur un enchaînement de jeux de mots. Cette "lettre à Laure" dont il déconseille l'imitation en ces termes: "malle et traits longanimité rends nos culs ne manne hier" (ma lettre est longue, à n'imiter en aucune manière) représente un cas-limite de l'écriture de Fourier. Si nous la mentionnons, c'est qu'elle nous semble confirmer la notion d'intervalle proposée plus haut. Fourier rédige dans cet exercice de style une lettre imaginaire en se basant sur un principe "phonorthographique": il s'agit de transcrire la parole orale à travers des graphies faisant résonner le mot utilisé avec ses homophones plus ou moins lointains (ce qui transforme par exemple affectionné en: "ah fais que si haut nez"). La signification des "mots" obtenus par ce biais se place entre celui du mot phonique et celui du mot graphique: le sens est ici totalement intersticiaire.

Le raffinement excessif du système tel qu'il transparaît dans certains passages du texte, le goût immodéré de Fourier pour le détail, les ramifications infinies de chaque catégorie semblent trahis par l'écriture: celle-ci est lacunaire lorsqu'il s'agit de rendre compte de l'intervalle continu du système pensé. La logique de la continuité, issue du modèle mathématique, se heurte au caractère discret des entités linguistiques et désigne le premier indice d'une incompatibilité entre le système pensé unifié et l'éclatement auquel le soumet l'écriture. On assiste au premier affrontement radical entre la pensée de Fourier et les possibilités d'expression que peut lui fournir l'écriture: le signifiant n'a pas la puissance du modèle mathématique auquel on avait essayé de le jumeler.

### *La frustration*

Prometteur par son titre et son sujet de descriptions croustillantes le *Nouveau Monde Amoureux* déçoit invariablement ces attentes voyeuristes. Par un mécanisme de déception, l'attente du lecteur est toujours trompée.

Avec qui coucheront-ils ? Cela ne nous importe. Notre objet n'est point de passer en revue les anecdotes galantes, mais de décrire seulement dans chaque branche de ces nouvelles coutumes ce qui est rigoureusement nécessaire à l'intelligence du mécanisme d'Harmonie. (375)

Le manuscrit se cantonne dans la théorie de l'agencement des masses, se refusant à offrir le moindre détail de scène sexuelle.

Tout le dispositif du texte (monotonie des descriptions, enchevêtrement, non des corps mais des branches du système, souci maniaque de quantification) œuvre en fait pour une lecture dépassionnée, comme si le plaisir du lecteur devait être systématiquement frustré, ou du moins n'avait droit à aucun égard.

Le texte nommé *Nouveau Monde Amoureux*, présenté comme initiateur d'une nouvelle ère de séduction, se dérobe lorsqu'il s'agit de séduire son auditoire. Ainsi, au moment de passer à la description des scènes érotiques, Fourier détourne le regard et tire le voile pudique de la théorie:

... toutes les armées ivres d'enthousiasme et de \*\*\*\* montèrent dans les camps cellulaires et salons secrets (étages supérieurs des tentes) pour y sceller en séance amoureuse des liens déjà serrés par l'amitié et l'admiration. Nous passerons sur les détails de cette séance et, en attendant que les croisés descendent et viennent prendre des rafraîchissements, \*\*\*\* je devrai peut-être entretenir le lecteur des conclusions promises depuis longtemps sur ces coutumes bizarres.... (372)

Fourier refuse donc de faire de son texte un objet de plaisir. Il ne le conçoit pas comme un objet de jouissance pour le lecteur, mais comme un outil d'organisation du monde: il n'y a pas de jubilation esthétique à lire un mode d'emploi.

Ce refus net chez Fourier de constituer son texte en objet de plaisir provient d'un souci constant de se distinguer des hommes de lettres: "je n'ai point l'art vanté par Diderot: tremper la plume dans l'arc-en-ciel [mais qu'importe] ma tâche n'est pas d'être fleuri mais d'être neuf" (112). Partant du constat de son inhabileté à l'éloquence, Fourier va s'en forger une arme qu'il retourne dans un premier temps contre tous les écrivains et philosophes qui l'ont précédé, puis, par la suite, contre les critiques qui l'accuseront d'obscurité.

Aux écrivains, romanciers et poètes, il reproche leur immoralité et l'inanité de leurs ouvrages. C'est pourquoi il refuse toute parenté entre leurs récits fantaisistes et ses fictions harmoniennes au nom de l'authenticité de sa démarche. Seul Rousseau échappe à l'impitoyable diatribe. Mais au-delà des écrivains et de l'inutilité de leurs écrits, Fourier rejette également les philosophes, les savants, les docteurs, les politiques: tous ceux qui au lieu de résoudre



les maux de l'humanité, ne firent que se gorger d'éloquence. A tous ces "enfileurs de mots," il reproche de s'être englués dans des théories verbeuses et contradictoires entre elles, et d'avoir accordé plus d'importance à la notoriété que leur confère leur système qu'à la réelle utilité de celui-ci pour remédier à la misère humaine. Il est impossible "de faire marcher de front le bonheur social et les 400.000 volumes qui ne produisent au lieu de bonheur que la pauvreté, la fausseté, l'oppression et le carnage" (NMA 416).

*"Mont nez loque anse" (Mon éloquence)*

Le souci de Fourier consiste alors à trouver le moyen d'indiquer que son œuvre recèle une invention véritablement exceptionnelle. C'est dans le but de la distinguer de celles de ses confrères qu'il va transformer la faiblesse de sa plume en force de conviction: son livre ne sera peut-être pas "beau," mais il aura le mérite d'être "vrai." La richesse de son contenu compensera largement les défauts de sa forme: "tout dénué qu'il est de ses banals ornements, ne suffit-il pas de la beauté du sujet pour dispenser l'auteur du tribut d'éloquence?" (112).

Fourier se présente dès le début de son œuvre comme le seul à avoir préféré la connaissance du problème qu'il expose aux dépens du moyen employé pour l'exprimer: "je n'ai posé que ce problème; je ne dois que cette solution. Fût-elle donnée en patois, j'aurai payé ma dette. (...). Car si un homme apporte une nouveauté immensément utile, n'est-il pas indifférent qu'il s'exprime en patois."<sup>2</sup>

Fourier présente donc les défauts de son style comme garant de rigueur et de vérité: puisque ce qui est charmant est trompeur, le repoussant voire l'illisible se font symptômes de sérieux. En récusant donc non seulement les écrivains mais aussi tous les penseurs, Fourier en arrive à se situer lui-même en dehors du monde intellectuel: c'est "un homme presque illitéré (sic), c'est un sergent de boutique qui va confondre ces bibliothèques politiques et morales."<sup>3</sup>

C'est cet habile retournement qui va lui permettre, en faisant de son incapacité à l'éloquence un refus volontaire de celle-ci, de se distinguer des écrivains et des philosophes. Mais c'est dans cette négation de son propre statut d'écrivain assimilé un peu rapidement à la seule notion d'habileté rhétorique que se noue la problématique qui fracture l'Utopie et lui substitue un non-lieu de l'écriture.



### *Le dernier des écrivains*

Fourier ne peut que constater qu'il n'a pas hérité en partage du don de prosateur. Loin de déplorer cette injustice et de considérer l'acquisition de cette qualité comme indispensable à son projet d'écriture, il s'en détourne et revendique, à défaut de la qualité de son expression, l'originalité de sa pensée:

Je voudrais ici pouvoir emprunter la plume de Virgile pour ajouter, comme il l'a fait dans les *Géorgiques* un épisode aux préceptes. Malheureusement, Virgile et moi forment [sic] les deux extrêmes de la chaîne civilisée, le plus éloquent des poètes et moi le plus faible des prosateurs, mais les extrêmes se touchent. Quel est notre point de contact ? C'est qu'il a pour lui la suprême perfection dans l'art d'écrire; j'ai pour moi, comme dernier des écrivains, la dispense absolue de cet art, et à ce titre il m'est permis de hasarder sans façon. (104)

C'est donc en alléguant une dangereuse division du travail (aux écrivains la mise en mots, à moi la conception des idées) que Fourier se condamne à rester incompréhensible, par son acharnement à séparer les deux fonctions d'*inventio* et d'*elocutio* qui définissent l'élaboration du discours depuis l'Antiquité classique. Quant à la *dispositio*, elle semble avoir été la dernière des préoccupations de l'auteur, tant son manuscrit—et toute son œuvre d'ailleurs—s'illustre par le désordre, l'incohérence et les redites.

Se retranchant volontairement dans la seule fonction d'inventeur—"rappelons sans cesse que je suis inventeur et non pas orateur" (*Nouveau Monde* 112)—, Fourier se trouve en peine lorsqu'il s'agit de communiquer l'ingénieux système que seule maîtrise sa pensée. Tout se passe comme si le texte ne voulait pas sortir de Fourier, comme si la source du salut s'épuisait sitôt qu'en aurait dû émerger la parole salvatrice.

Les difficultés d'émission du message, manifestées par les diverses attitudes de refus qui caractérisent Fourier face à l'écriture, se redoublent cependant de difficultés de réception, qui rejettent sur les lecteurs la responsabilité des impasses sur lesquelles bute l'auteur.

### *Le génie méconnu*

Fourier se sait, depuis la publication de son premier ouvrage, constamment en butte à des problèmes de réception. S'illusionnant

sur l'origine de ce blocage et n'accordant que très peu de place à sa propre responsabilité, Fourier cherche d'autres raisons à cet échec. Qu'il dénonce l'engouement de ses compatriotes pour l'exotisme d'Outre-Manche ("si au lieu de me signer Fourier, je signais Fourington, tout Français me proclamerait un illustre génie qui va surpasser Newton" [*Théorie des quatre mouvements* 324]) ou qu'il s'en prenne à l'irréductible obstruction de ses contemporains à toute nouveauté ("Voilà le bel esprit des Français, chaque fois qu'on traite avec eux quelque matière neuve et surprenante, ils s'empressent de dégoiser 1000 balivernes pour prouver à l'auteur qu'ils connaissent mieux que lui ce dont il va parler " [*Nouveau Monde* 350])), Fourier souffre de n'être pas pris au sérieux.

Si dans le *Nouveau Monde Amoureux*, et après tous ses autres ouvrages, le système est toujours incompris de ses lecteurs, ce n'est pas le défaut de son travail d'écrivain (l'élaboration d'un système incompréhensible) qui est en cause, mais l'attitude de ces mêmes lecteurs, incapables du moindre effort de compréhension. Toutes les critiques que l'on risquerait de lui adresser sont ainsi prévenues et retournées à l'encontre de ceux qui seraient tentés de les proférer. Qu'on lui reproche son "illisibilité," il rétorque que la clarté que réclament ses critiques est ce qui répond à un certain mode d'expression qu'il dénonce comme illusoire: l'éloquence. Les maladresses et le jargon étrange qui étayent son style sont autant d'éléments qui, d'après ses critères, parlent en faveur de l'authenticité de ses idées. Qu'on tourne ces dernières en ridicule ne dérange pas Fourier. Il sait que ses propositions vont à l'encontre des dogmes et des préjugés de sa société et que les valeurs qu'il privilégie (comme le céladonisme) sont méprisées en civilisation.

Fourier généralise ensuite ce procédé de défense à travers ce qu'il définit comme étant incompréhensible aux civilisés. En effet, nombre de catégories auxquelles aboutit son raffinement sont non seulement inconnues mais inconnaissables pour un civilisé. D'une part, le lecteur n'a accès qu'à une partie du système, celle qui est rédigée. Or le système ne peut se comprendre que dans son ensemble, lorsque toutes les relations entre les différentes branches auront été explicitées. D'autre part, et plus fondamentalement, les catégories et l'axiologie que Fourier met en place sont en tant que telles (c'est-à-dire, en tant qu'harmoniennes) inaccessibles à l'esprit borné par les habitudes civilisées. Incapable en effet de remédier

aux défauts qui le rendent illisible, Fourier fait de son texte quelque chose d'incompréhensible du fait du récepteur.

Dans la mesure où l'on définit le projet d'écriture de Fourier comme une entreprise dont l'enjeu n'est pas la rédaction d'un livre à ajouter "aux 400.000 volumes qui encombrent les bibliothèques" (416), mais finalement l'instauration d'une société nouvelle, son œuvre est un échec dont la cause est à chercher dans la fractalisation de l'idée par le discours.

Si la critique qu'il profère à l'encontre des civilisés et de leur mode de vie ou de gestion sociale est assez fine, suffisamment en tout cas pour que l'on ait cru pouvoir lire chez Fourier les germes des théories qui feront date dans l'histoire des idées du XXe siècle—psychanalyse, marxisme, etc.—, la communication de son système, qui devait constituer l'essentiel de l'œuvre, ne s'accomplit pas.

Cet échec dont Fourier est plus ou moins conscient se joue aux deux pôles du circuit de la communication: du côté de l'émission de son message salvateur, il est pris dans un constant et monotone va-et-vient entre deux positions de fuite. Tantôt il se considère comme le porte-parole de Dieu et, à ce titre, ne situe pas sa tâche au niveau de l'élaboration des idées, mais seulement à celui de la formulation d'un système déjà conçu. Tantôt, face aux difficultés de rédaction qu'il rencontre sitôt qu'il essaie d'exposer ce système, il ne se veut plus qu'inventeur et refuse tout ce qui relève de l'*elocutio* proprement dite. Du côté de la réception, on a vu que, sans doute pour excuser son impuissance à émettre un message consistant, il faisait de la prégnance aveuglante de préjugés obsolètes sur ses lecteurs civilisés la cause fondamentale de son incompréhension. Même si ses balbutiements parvenaient à se parer de la plus parfaite éloquence, tout son projet de transformation du monde serait donc suspendu à une lecture impossible de son texte par les civilisés.

### *La faille est au cœur du système*

Fourier bute en fait sans cesse sur cette contradiction centrale qui nourrit l'échec de son entreprise: la méprise sur le destinataire de son discours. Il semble ignorer superbement quelques principes fondamentaux de l'échange linguistique, entre autre, celui qui veut que le "bon" code soit celui du récepteur; s'il s'adresse à des civilisés, il doit se rendre intelligible pour eux. Or le texte qu'il

tente de produire pour transfigurer la "Civilisation" en "Harmonie" ne peut être compris des civilisés auxquels il s'adresse. Le peu qu'il en dit est incompréhensible pour qui n'a pas connaissance de la totalité, ce qui est le cas de tous ses lecteurs.

Ce que Fourier expose de sa théorie ne peut donc être compréhensible que de ces Harmoniens qui seuls paient à sa cendre le tribu de gratitude qui lui est dû mais pour qui cependant l'exposition du système n'a plus aucun enjeu. Isolé de ses lecteurs civilisés, contraint d'attribuer à des êtres de fiction la reconnaissance qu'il attendait de ses contemporains, Fourier demeure seul en terre d'Harmonie et son projet s'étrangle dans le nœud de cette contradiction qui veut que le résultat du processus—soit l'existence de récepteurs capables de comprendre les fragments de son nouveau discours amoureux—soit requis pour le déclenchement même du processus.

Alors que Fourier s'efforce tout au long de son œuvre de tout mettre en correspondance et d'effacer la moindre faille, il subit cette faille dans la transmission même de son système. La dysharmonie refoulée du monde réapparaît au cœur de la communication.

Nous noterons encore que le paradoxe qui veut que seuls des récepteurs vivant déjà en Harmonie soient aptes à comprendre le texte qui devrait faire advenir cette Harmonie ne constitue pas le moins intéressant des aspects de l'œuvre de Fourier. S'il constitue cette faille qui engloutit le projet social, il est peut-être aussi le passage vers une nouvelle définition du texte fouriériste comme texte d'utopie. Il s'agirait d'un texte qui court-circuite sa propre intention d'action sur le monde en ne s'adressant finalement qu'aux êtres de fiction qu'il cache en son sein mais qui n'ont plus besoin de ce discours pragmatique puisqu'ils sont au-delà de l'action réelle, immortalisés dans la froide et poussiéreuse paralysie des bibliothèques.

### *Conclusion*

"Quand on veut ainsi mettre le soleil dans sa culotte, on brûle sa culotte et on pisse sur le soleil."

—FLAUBERT

La tentation pourrait être grande, au terme de notre parcours, de situer Fourier, malgré ses protestations, en pleine littérature.

Son exploration de l'Harmonie amoureuse ne constitue-t-elle pas une simple expansion du monde de ces insulaires, brièvement présentés par Diderot, dont les "bijoux" s'ajustent en parfaite conformité pour garantir un fonctionnement sans heurts de la mécanique passionnelle? L'organisation méticuleuse de son projet rédactionnel, en parties et sous-parties destinées à quadriller jusqu'aux recoins les plus insoupçonnés de la société harmonienne, n'anticipe-t-elle pas les grandes fresques sociales qui hanteront le XIXe siècle, de *La Comédie Humaine* aux *Rougon-Macquart*? Son ambition enfin d'écrire "le dernier des livres," l'œuvre qui cloue le bec à vingt siècles de vains palabres, n'annonce-t-elle pas le fantasme flaubertien énoncé à l'occasion du cycle Bouvard et Pécuchet de produire un texte tel "qu'une fois qu'on l'aurait lu on n'osât plus parler,"<sup>4</sup> ou la visée mallarméenne, déjà évoquée, du Livre Absolu?

Au-delà de ces analogies quelque peu superficielles, l'œuvre de Fourier n'est-elle pas prise d'un bout à l'autre dans une dérive faisant tendre ce qui était originellement conçu comme un mode d'emploi d'organisation sociale vers un espace purement fictionnel où l'imaginaire a phagocyté sans retour tout résidu de rationalité sociologique? A force d'accorder, par ses commentaires, un même degré de réalité aux valorisations sociales du céladonisme ou aux infinies péripéties de la guerre des sexes (ce qui, à ses yeux, devait attirer le rêve d'aujourd'hui vers la réalité de demain) ne contribue pour nous qu'à tout confondre en un magma fictionnel condamné à rester pur délire littéraire.

Car Fourier n'est somme toute que l'auteur d'un livre: quel indice plus clair de sa littérarité, dira-t-on, que de voir sa création réduite à un monde de mots, régi par la règle des mots et limité par les bornes de leur vanité? Si nous pensons devoir repousser cette tentation assimilatrice, c'est que l'œuvre de Fourier ne mérite à nos yeux d'être lue que dans l'exacte mesure de sa résistance à se faire réduire à de la littérature. Si ses écrits recèlent quelque beauté, ce n'est sans doute ni pour les étonnants raffinements de son système, ni pour les débordements auxquels s'y livre son imagination, mais bien plutôt pour la tension constamment maintenue entre l'urgence immédiate d'un but (transformer le monde) et la disproportion pathétique des moyens mis en œuvre (gribouiller des esquisses saugrenues).



Comme nous le soulignons en introduction, l'effet de séduction qui émane des textes fouriéristes tient moins à ces textes eux-mêmes qu'à l'écart qu'ils entretiennent avec le projet qui leur a donné naissance: si le livre qu'a écrit Fourier retient encore notre attention, c'est dans la mesure où en son lieu s'affirme à tout instant l'intention de susciter un monde (bien réel). Par sa volonté d'être autre chose et plus qu'un écrivain (un inventeur, un génie fondateur), Fourier éclaire ce qui chez d'autres littérateurs reste le plus souvent dans les limbes de l'entreprise scripturale. L'excès même de son velléitarisme dénonce un défaut d'ambition chez quiconque, dès lors, écrit sans se proposer pour objectif immédiat la rédemption de l'humanité.

Nous remarquons initialement que la lecture de Fourier est d'abord source de déception. Nous pouvons maintenant mieux en saisir les fondements. Si, en refermant le *Nouveau Monde Amoureux* le lecteur éprouve de la déception, dans la mesure où il se sent trompé sur la marchandise et désillusionné quant au but suggéré, ce sentiment a moins trait à la qualité esthétique du livre (illisibilité, incohérence du système, précipitation de l'expression...) qu'à sa fonction pragmatique: malgré tout ce qu'il a pu faire miroiter en cours de lecture, le livre n'est pas parvenu, ne parvient et ne parviendra pas à "transformer le monde." Tout le mouvement du texte fouriériste (visée et butée) place donc auteur et lecteur dans une position d'insatisfaction qui peut contaminer la lecture de n'importe quel autre écrit. Tant que la "Civilisation" fait perdurer les aberrations, les injustices et les frustrations dénoncées par l'utopiste, un écrivain peut-il viser à autre chose que faire advenir, par son livre, l'"Harmonie" dans le monde réel? Peut-il par ailleurs faire preuve de suffisamment de naïveté pour espérer que le pouvoir de sa plume ne vienne pas buter contre un objectif aussi démesuré?

Si le dispositif mis en place par Fourier donne à la plus complète réussite esthétique un arrière-goût d'inachèvement et d'insuffisance, il contribue du moins à éclairer une des conditions nécessaires à l'exercice du travail d'écrivain. Contrairement à un mythe largement honoré, le littérateur (le "poète") n'est pas celui qui a une foi magique dans les propriétés du langage. C'est pour avoir sacrifié à cette croyance que Fourier a échoué dès les premiers pas de sa démarche puisqu'il n'est même pas parvenu à faire du *Nouveau Monde Amoureux* un texte conséquent. En ne se donnant

pas la peine de travailler sur la médiation langagière, en refusant d'élaborer lui-même un outil de verbe lui permettant d'agir sur la société, loin d'adopter une position de méfiance à l'égard des mots, il participe de fait à une crédulité qui surestime les pouvoirs de la langue. Debout en bout, il veut croire que la Vérité s'exprime toute seule, à travers la parole brute du prophète, et que Dieu (ou la Vérité, ou l'Idée) peut ensemençer les esprits et faire tout entrer dans le jeu parfait de correspondances initiales et ultimes. Pour que portât sa parole, il lui aurait fallu se défaire de cette croyance magique: écrire, dans cette perspective, ce serait commencer par savoir que la Vérité n'est pas et que c'est au poète qu'il incombe de travailler à une médiation qui, sans fin, obture ce défaut.

Cette absence de médiation laisse Fourier seul et nu face à une exigence éthique de charité infinie.<sup>5</sup> Et s'il est impuissant à combler ce défaut divin, c'est sans doute pour la raison qu'a désignée Flaubert: "Quand on veut ainsi mettre le soleil dans sa culotte, on brûle sa culotte et on pisse sur le soleil" (Flaubert, *Préface* 80). Pisser sur le soleil: on a vu comment Fourier, en se fixant pour tâche de féconder et de restructurer l'univers lui-même, ne parvenait qu'à humecter de quelques taches illisibles le papier de ses manuscrits. Brûler sa culotte: face à un objectif aussi gigantesque, il ne peut que buter dès le premier pas (celui de l'élaboration/rédaction de son système) et en arriver vite à calciner son mode d'expression au point de se retrouver aphone, ou plutôt agraphe, comme en témoignent les blancs qui tendent à envahir les phrases de ses écrits.

La sagesse antique savait déjà que regarder le soleil en face n'est pas le meilleur moyen d'y voir clair, mais bien de s'aveugler. La réussite du projet éthique de Fourier passait par une réussite esthétique qu'il n'aurait pu atteindre qu'en quittant un instant des yeux son fascinant impératif de charité: le but ne saurait être atteint que par celui qui aura su y renoncer.

Fût-ce pour s'élever au-dessus d'elle, il faut accepter de mettre un pied en littérature, sans quoi on est condamné, comme Fourier, à y retomber malgré soi.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "[Ce texte] est difficile à lire, plus difficile encore à rétablir selon l'ordre que Fourier indique en de brèves notes ou dans des tables des matières et les plans successifs qui s'enveloppent l'un l'autre ou bien divergent, dessinant plusieurs orientations possibles." (Simone Debout, *Préface du Nouveau Monde Amoureux*, p.VIII)

<sup>2</sup> Ch. Fourier, *Théorie des quatre mouvements*, in *Œuvres complètes*, tome 1, 322.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. Fourier, *Théorie des quatre mouvements*, 102.

<sup>4</sup> G. Flaubert, *Préface à la vie d'écrivain. Extraits de la correspondance*, éd. G. Bollème, Paris: Seuil, 1963, "Lettre à Louise Colet du 17 décembre 1852".

<sup>5</sup> Ce travail d'élaboration de tous les moyens imaginables pour améliorer la vie du prochain inscrit parfaitement Fourier dans le basculement décrit par Michel Foucault d'un pouvoir centré sur le droit de mort à un "bio-pouvoir" qui s'applique à "distribuer le vivant dans un domaine de valeur et d'utilité;" dans l'œuvre de l'utopiste, il est patent que "la vieille puissance de la mort où se symbolisait le pouvoir souverain est maintenant recouverte soigneusement par l'administration des corps et la gestion calculatrice de la vie." Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité, tome 1: La Volonté de savoir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1976. 189 & 183-4.

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## UCLA French Department

### Dissertation Abstracts

Marianne Golding. *Deux auteurs de la provocation: Mérimée et Robbe-Grillet à travers leurs stratégies narratives*. (Ph.D. Dissertation: Eric Gans, Chair, UCLA, 1996)

Prosper Mérimée et Alain Robbe-Grillet sont des auteurs qui, bien que fort différents à maints points de vue, se ressemblent dans leurs façons de manier la narration et les ambiguïtés textuelles. Malgré ces similarités, on dénote chez Mérimée une plus grande réserve que chez Robbe-Grillet dont les expériences narratives sont particulièrement audacieuses. Les méthodes des deux auteurs démontrent le même désir de libérer la littérature en révélant son aspect artificiel, et d'impliquer le lecteur dans la production du texte. L'intérêt des stratégies narratives analysées est de faire participer le lecteur à la création du texte qu'il lit; cette perspective a été éclairée par la théorie de l'esthétique de la réception dont Wolfgang Iser est l'un des grands portes-parole.

Les stratégies narratives discutées sont le *motif répétitif*, l'*indécidabilité* amenée par les *vides* et les interprétations multiples, l'*infiabilité* du narrateur, la réflexivité du texte, et finalement la *violence narrative* que nous distinguons de la *violence diégétique*. Notre analyse des stratégies narratives montre que chez ces deux auteurs réputés pour la violence de leurs récits, ce n'est pas seulement la violence des événements et des personnages qui crée une ambiance agressive, mais également la manière de communiquer le texte. Les méthodes de Mérimée et de Robbe-Grillet déstabilisent le lecteur en trompant ses attentes; en même temps, elles le font participer plus pleinement à l'écriture du texte.

L'étude des œuvres de Mérimée et de Robbe-Grillet nous a permis de révéler la modernité de Mérimée à travers les stratégies employées dans ses récits, stratégies que l'on retrouve dans les romans de Robbe-Grillet. Notre analyse met en évidence les ressemblances entre les œuvres des deux écrivains.





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